DISCOURSES

On several

SUBJECTS,

VIZ.

1. On the Power and Efficacy of Faith.

2. The danger of a Mis-inform'd Conscience, or mistaken Principles in Religion.

3. Of the different Dispensations of Grace, and of Impenitency under the best means of salvation.

4. The Case of a Late, or Death Bed Repentance.

5. The streight and certain way to Happiness.

6. Of growth in Grace.

7. Of Murther, particularly duelling and self-murther.

8. Of the shortness and instability of Humane Life.

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DISCOURS
SUR LES

THE PREFACE TO THE Reader.

THE true End of Printing Sermons, is to promote the Belief and Practice of Christianity: Which must be at a low Ebb, while the Witty part of the World is Floating in *Scepticism*, and the Heavier sinking into down-right *Atheism* and *Sensuality*. And This, I think, is so good an End in it self, that it certainly needs no Excuse. For I know not why any Man may not venture upon doing Good, without asking leave of the World,

or Pleading the Importunity of Friends, or craving a Protection for it. All the Discouragement lies in the Difficulty there is in reaching this excellent End, especially in this Singular and Confident Age; in which He is no Body almost that has not an Opinion by himself: And he is counted a very easie Man, that will resign it to a stronger Judgment, for being reduced to a Contradiction or two, or convinc'd of a few untoward Consequences of it. But however this be, I think it becomes the Ministers of Religion to perswade Men (if it be possible) to be Wise and Happy; and while the Scriptures are of any Authority with them, to Admonish them of the Truths which belong to their Eternal Peace.

And this I can truly say, is the Design

Design of the following Sermons: The two first of which are framed to shew the great Difference there is between a stable and well-grounded Faith, and meer Confidence and Opinion; or between the Faith of *Abraham*, which carried him through the greatest Tryals and Difficulties, and the Presumption of a Pharisee, which did as strange things in their kind. For as *Abraham* by Faith offered up his Son in Obedience to God: So *Saul* by the impulse of his Opinions, Persecuted the Children of *Abrahams* Faith, and verily thought, till our Saviour called to him out of Heaven (as the Angel did to *Abraham*) that he was doing the Will of God, even when he was going to make a Sacrifice of Christianity it self.

The Design of the Third and

Fourth Sermons, is to represent the extream Danger of Impenitency under the Powerful means of Grace, and of Trusting to a late or Death-Bed Repentance. These, I fear, are very Grating and Unpleasant Subjects; But I the rather think they require the plainer dealing; and must needs say in reference to the Latter, that upon the Review, I cannot esteem it any breach of Charity to have wrested a Text (perhaps more frequently mis-applyed than any other in the Gospel) out of the hands of those that were never Fairly in possession of it, and are apt (as St. *Peter* speaks of some others) to wrest it to their Own Destruction.

The Fifth was delivered at a time, when great Endeavours were used to turn us out of the streight

Way

Way to Heaven: Which gave occaſion to ſhew the Grounds of our Proteſtant Faith, and the great Advantages it has above the Romiſh in point of certainty. How much Reaſon we have to adhere to the Doctrine of our own Church, and to adorn it by the Purity of our Lives and Examples. And the Way to do this, is deſcribed and recommended in the following Diſcourſe concerning our Improvement in all Chriſtian Vertues and Graces.

And were we once perſwaded to govern our Lives by the Principles of our Religion, we might juſtly hope to Enjoy them more, and perhaps much longer than we do. We ſhould think it no Diſhonour to ſuffer thoſe, that Affront and Deſpitefully uſe us, to live out the ſhort term of Life,

which

which God and Nature hath ſet them, and make better Uſe of the ſhortneſs and uncertainty of our Own; to bring us to which happy Temper, is the Deſign of the two laſt Sermons.

As to the Compoſure of theſe few Diſcourſes, the Reader will find enough to exerciſe his Candour and Ingenuity. All I can hope for is, That they may be ſerviceable in ſome meaſure to the Lovers of Truth, for whoſe ſakes they are Publiſhed; & that the Venture will be the more Pardonable, becauſe my Infirmities at preſent are ſuch as hinder the Diſcharge of the Ordinary Duties of my Function. God grant his Bleſſing to all Faithful Endeavours to Preſerve the Truth, and Promote Peace and Piety.

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SERMON

Sermon I.

Concerning the Power and Efficacy of Faith.

Hebr. 11. 17, 18.

By Faith Abraham *when he was tryed, Offered up* Iſaac; *and he that had received the Promiſes, Offered up his Only begotten Son;*
Of whom it was ſaid, that in Iſaac *ſhall thy Seed be called.*

THE Author of this Epiſtle diſcourſeth in this Chapter of two Eminent Points of Knowledge; the Nature of Divine Faith, and the mighty Power and Efficacy of it. In the firſt Verſe he calls it ἐλπιζομένων, ὑπόστασιν, a grounded Expectation

tion of things hoped for and πραγμάτων ἔλεγχον οὐ βλεπομένων, a Conviction of things not seen; such as the Creation of this, and the Existence of a better World. And this shews the Nature of Faith, to lye in a firm Perswasion of Truths and Promises, grounded upon the Testimony of God, and not upon any sensible Evidence of the Reality of them. And accordingly, the Holy Men whose Faith is so much magnifyed in this Chapter, are said to have dyed in Faith, being perswaded of the Promises, and having embraced them many Ages before the time was come for the accomplishment of them. Then, for the Power and Efficacy of this Grace, the Apostle tells us what Transcendent things it has done in Ancient times, and that by vertue of it, the Elders obtained a good Report; by which he means, That the Great and Famous Actions Recorded of the Patriarchs and other Worthies in the Old Testament, were all owing to their Faith; by Faith they pleased God, bore up against the Malice of the World, subdued Kingdoms, and wrought Righteousness,

ver. 3. 5. &c.

ver. 13.

ver. 2.

nes, in despight of the greatest Difficulties and the highest Discouragements. Many Instances he gives us of these Noble Flights of Faith, ; amongst which there is none in all respects more remarkable than the Example in the Text: *By Faith* Abraham *when he was tryed, Offered up* Isaac ; *and he that Received the Promises offered up his only begotten Son ; Of whom it was said, that in* Isaac *shall thy Seed be called.*

Two things are observable in these Words:

1. The Hardness of the Tryal which God made of *Abraham*, when he commanded him to offer up *Isaac* to Him.

2. The Issue of this Tryal, or the Victory of *Abraham*'s Faith over all the Hardships and Discouragements which he met with in it. Both these were extraordinary, and being written for our Instruction, will surely afford us very useful Reflections in reference to our Faith and Practice. I begin with the First, *viz.*

1. The Hardness of the Tryal, which God put *Abraham* upon, for the

the Diſcovery of his Faith and affiance in him. The Text calls it a Tryal, which implies that God commanded *Abraham* to offer up his Son; for had it been a Free-will Offering, without any Order or Direction from God (ſuch as the Heathen Oblations were, when they Sacrificed their Children to their Idols) it had been a plain and horrid Act of Murther. Nor was it neceſſary (as ſome have Fancied) to clear the Righteouſneſs of God and *Abraham* in this matter, that God ſhould diſpence with the Sixth Commandment, when he obliged the Patriarch to kill his Son, becauſe it had been Murther to kill him without his Command: For that Commandment (as is plain by the caſe before us) Forbids only to Kill without Gods Authority; which *Abraham* never went about to do, and therefore needed no Diſpenſation for it. He had an Expreſs Commiſſion from God, who is abſolute Lord of Life and Death, and never barrs his Prerogative by his Laws, and may therefore uſe his Power as he pleaſes, and take away the Life of the moſt Innocent Perſon, as well

well by the Hand of a Father, and the Fire upon the Altar as by an Infection in the Air, by Lightning or Tempeſt, or any other Meſſenger of Death. And thus *Moſes* tells us, that God Tempted *Abraham*, and bid him go and offer his Son upon a certain Mountain in *Moriah* for a Burnt *Offering*, *Gen.* 22. 1, 2. And herein lay the ſharpneſs of *Abrahams* Tryal, that either he muſt contend with God, and Diſpute his Authority, or do the ſtrangeſt thing that ever was done in the World to pleaſe him.

That we may the better underſtand the Caſe, let us conſider what it was that God demanded of *Abraham*, as a Teſt of his ſincerity towards Him, and what plauſible Arguments a Perſon in his Circumſtances might be ſuppoſed to frame againſt it.

1. Firſt then, God commands him to Sacrifice his Son, than which nothing could be more ſurprizing, or unwelcome to him. Who ever heard of ſuch an Act of Piety before, of ſo hard a Precept, or ſo Unlikely a way of pleaſing God as this? What would

an ordinary Faith have done, how would natural Reason have Pleaded in this case? Might not *Abraham* himself be supposed to reason thus? Must I then lay aside all Humanity, and imbrue my Hands in the Blood of my Own Son? Must I forget that I am a Father, and Destroy the Life which I gave? Does not Nature teach us to be Kind and Dutiful towards the Offspring of our own Bowels? And are not the Laws of Nature Engraven upon our Minds by the Finger of God himself? Has not the Reason which God has given me, hitherto condemned the Action which he now Commands? And tho' I know he is always Just and Good, and would do always that which I know would Please him, yet how can I hope to Please him by Destroying his Image in my own Child? What will the World say of me, who profess to Worship God in the purest manner, should I Pollute his Altars with my Sons Blood, and do that strange and unaccountable thing, which must needs be a Scandal to his Holy Religion? So harsh a command as this was enough to put, not Nature

ture only, but Faith it ſelf upon the ſtretch; and being perfectly New and Arbitrary, to fright Men from the Worſhip of God, which this Holy Man had been the Beſt Example, and the greateſt Promoter of.

2. But then, God did not only command *Abraham* to Sacrifice his Son, but his Beloved and Only Son *Iſaac*, *i. e.* his only Son by *Sarah* the Free-Woman, and true Mother of the Family, which was to convey an Univerſal Bleſſing to Mankind. *Take now thy Son* (ſaith God) *thine only Son* Iſaac, *whom thou loveſt, and get thee into the Land of* Moriah, *and offer him there for a Burnt Offering.* And this greatly increaſes the difficulty of *Abrahams* Obedience, that it ſhould pleaſe God to demand, not one out of many, but his Only Son, his *Iſaac* whom he intirely loved, the only Joy of his Mother, and the only hope of the Family, which was to make the beſt figure of any other in the World. And now might not *Abraham* have ſaid, Lord, muſt I bereave my ſelf of the Child, which nothing but a Miracle of thine could raiſe out of my Aged Loins? Muſt I take away a Gen. 22. 2.

Life, for which I would gladly Exchange my own? Will not all my Flocks and Herds afford an Acceptable Sacrifice to thee? All these I would freely offer, instead of that Innocent Lamb, in which all my Earthly Treasure and Comfort lies. *Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak this once: Is not the Life of* Sarah *bound up in the Life of the Child?* How shall I answer the Death of *Isaac* to her? Or must I be the Instrument of two such Deaths at once, and when I have slain the Son, carry the Killing Tidings to the Unhappy Mother? Oh how great a streight was this Good Man driven into! when he must either have forfeited the Favour of God, or bereaved himself of all that was Dear to him in this World, by the strangest act of Obedience, that was ever heard of in it.

3. Another grand Discouragement to *Abrahams* Obedience was, that his Beloved *Isaac* was a Son of very great and glorious Promises, which his untimely Death must, without a Miracle, frustrate the completion of. For God had promised to make him the Father of a numerous Off-spring, and that in him

him ſhould all the Nations of the Earth be Bleſſed. And 'tis certain, That Gods Command to *Abraham* to offer up his Son, was not more expreſs than his Promiſe concerning that very Son, of whom it was ſaid, *That in* Iſaac *ſhall thy Seed be called.*

And this ſtarts a new Difficulty: For now the Queſtion ſeems to be, whether *Abraham* was more obliged to obey Gods Injunction, than to Believe his Promiſes; which would naturally ſuggeſt ſuch thoughts to him as theſe. God has given me a Son, and in him a Promiſe of a bleſſed Seed, and a numerous Poſterity; If I execute his command, what will his promiſe ſignify? Shall *Iſaac* become a Father, when I have made him a Sacrifice? when I have taken away his Life in Obedience to God, will he ſend him back to me? Surely if he deſigned to do this, He that has been ſo gratious as to reveal himſelf upon ſeveral occaſions to me, would not hide ſo great and joyful a Secret from me. 'Tis true, God has an unqueſtionable Right to my Obedience, but then he is pleaſed to give me a Right in his Promiſe: And ſince

He is not a Man that he ſhould Repent, and ſince his promiſe was antecedent to his Command, may I not Interpret his Command by his Promiſe? And infer from hence, that whatever Tryal he is pleaſed to put me upon, yet having Promiſed to bleſs *Iſaac*, and all Nations in his Seed, he does not really chuſe that I ſhould violate his Precious Life, and ſo ſtop the current of his future and choiſeſt Favours to Mankind. But beſides theſe perplexities,

4 *Abraham* had this diſadvantage more, that Gods command required a ſpeedy Execution: So that he had little or no time to ſettle his thoughts about it, and to ſuppreſs thoſe Reaſonings which we muſt allow to be very Natural in his Caſe. *Take now thy Son* (ſaith God) *thine only Son Iſaac.*— A ſhort warning for a man to part with an Only Son, eſpecially one ſo endeared by Divine Favours, and Promiſes as *Iſaac* was, and in that ſevere manner that *Abraham* was obliged to do. A ſmall time for a Tender-hearted Father, to overcome the ſtruggle between Faith and Nature, which it is hard to think

think the Father of the Faithful could be on this Occaſion exempted from. And this makes the caſe much harder on *Abrahams* ſide, that he had but very little time to recollect himſelf, to quiet his Paternal Affections, and to ſettle his mind upon a Subject, ſo every way Entangled with Difficulties, and that required ſo much fineneſs and ſtrength of Thoughts to clear his way through, and to come to a perfect Reſolution with himſelf about it. So that on all accounts, this Tryal of *Abraham* appears to be one of the ſoreſt and hardeſt Tryals which God ever Impoſed upon any of his Faithful Servants.

I come now to the Second thing obſervable in theſe words, *viz.*

II. The Iſſue of this Tryal, or the Victory of *Abraham's* Faith over all the Hardſhips and Diſcouragements he met with in it. And here I ſhall diſtinctly conſider theſe two Particulars.

Firſt, The Compleatneſs of this Victory, and

Secondly, The Power or Principle by which it was wrought.

By Faith (ſaith the Apoſtle) *Abraham, when he was tryed, Offered up* Iſaac.

I. For the firſt of theſe, the com-

pleatneſs of the Victory, we muſt remember that it lay in *Abrahams* Fulfilling the Command of God with an Undaunted Reſolution, in deſpight of the Difficulties he was ſurrounded with, to which he proceeded by theſe following ſteps.

1. He immediately applyed himſelf to the Performance of Gods Command. When God had once declared his pleaſure to him, 'tis ſaid, he Roſe up early in the Morning, and having
Gen. 22.3 made all things ready for a Sacrifice, began his Journey to *Moriah*; which ſhews that he had a very quick and lively ſenſe of his Duty to God in all Caſes: And that what ever Tryal it might pleaſe God to make of him, he was provided for it before hand, and was not to be ſurprized by the moſt daſhing or ſevere Injunction. And in this he was an admirable Pattern to the Servants of God in all Ages, of the greateſt perfection which in this life they are capable of: I mean, a Conſtant Readineſs and diſpoſition to reſign up themſelves entirely to him, and to part freely with the very Choiceſt Bleſſings he is pleaſed to enrich them with.

2. He

2. He uſes all the Prudence and caution, which the Tenderneſs of the Caſe did require. He keeps the matter to himſelf, leaſt by taking Air, and coming to the knowledge of his Wife or Son, it ſhould awaken thoſe Paſſions in them, which might tempt him to forego his Reſolution. He gets up early in the Morning, takes *Iſaac* his Son and two of his Servants with him: Them he leaves at a convenient Diſtance, leaſt they ſhould obſtruct his Deſign, and Him he leads on to the Place of Worſhip, telling him that God would provide himſelf a Lamb, the only thing which ſeem'd to be wanting for a Burnt-Offering. Thus he carries the matter with all immaginable advantage towards the Execution of his purpoſe; He keeps the ſecret from her that lay in the ſame Boſom with it; he makes no complaints of the Hardſhips he was put upon, Faſtens no parting Kiſs upon his Dying *Iſaac*, nor betrays his Sad Intention, or any Reluctancy within himſelf, ſo much as by a ſingle Sigh or Tear. And what more could the moſt Affectionate Father do, to ſave the Life of a beloved Gen. 22. 3, 5, 8.

and

and only Son, than *Abraham*, out of pure Obedience to Gods Command, did to compass the Death of his? But more than this,

3. He carried on his Obedience to the utmost point of Perfection. The Fatal Knife was in his Hand, his Son lay panting upon the Altar, and he
Gen. 22, 9, 10, 11. was just giving the deadly stroke when the Angel called to him out of Heaven to stay his Hand, which if he had not done, he had certainly in a few moments sent *Isaac* thither. So that there was nothing wanting in *Abrahams* complyance with God in all that he required of him. He perfectly Resigned up his Will to him: He weaned himself from every thing that was dear to him in this World: He offered up his very *Isaac* so far, that there was but a moment between him and Death; and by that wonderful Act gave such a demonstration of his Piety and entire Dependance upon God, as procured this Glorious Testimony from him, *Now*
v. 12. *know I that thou fearest me, since thou hast not witheld thy Son, thine Only Son from me.* To all which may be added,

4. That this good Man never demurred

murred or faultered all the while he was upon his Tryal. One would think it was impoſſible for him to go through ſo ſevere a Task without repining at ſome or other of the Difficulties impoſed upon him. One of us would be very apt to Fancy, that every time he caſt his Eye upon his Son, and Talkt with him upon the Way to *Moriah*, Nature ſhould make a ſtand, and his Heart ſhould fail him, to think what a ſad Uncomfortable Errand he was going upon. But we meet with nothing of all this in *Abrahams* deportment, during the whole proceſs of his Tryal; He did not make a falſe ſtep in three Days Journey to *Moriah*: He was ſo far from ſtaggering at the ſtrangeneſs of things, that he went on without delay, (and as far as appears by the Hiſtory of this great Action) proceeded by even and conſtant ſteps, through all the Stages of his Tedious Duty. Even when he came to the Mountain which God told him of, had built an Altar, and laid the Wood in order upon it, he did not ſo much as allow himſelf to ſay, muſt I now Burn the ſtaff of my Old-Age, and the dear-

Gen. 22. 9.

eſt

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Gen. 22. 9.

eſt

eſt Pledge of Gods Favour to me and all Ages of the World? So that we ſee, he perfectly overcame the Difficulties, and ſurmounted the Diſcouragements, which his way was obſtructed with.

2. The Power or Principle by which this Tranſcendent Act of Righteouſneſs was wrought, *i. e.* by which *Abraham* Prevailed with himſelf, and over all Diſcouragements, to offer up *Iſaac*. The Apoſtle aſcribes it to his Faith: Now Faith we know, is ſometimes taken for an habitual Belief or Perſwaſion of the Perfections, Truths, and Promiſes of God, and ſometimes for a ſingle Act of this eminent Grace: and there are places, of which the Text is one, in which it is apparently Uſed in both ſenſes.

1. *Firſt* then, the honour of this Noble Action was owing to a conſtant and habitual Perſwaſion of Divine Truths and Promiſes, which *Abraham* had attained unto. He had been long accuſtomed to believe God upon his Word, and to rely upon his Truth and Faithfulneſs: And being fully perſwaded of the Reality and concern-

ment

ment of all that he Revealed to him, it was eaſie for him to conclude and ſettle upon this great Principle of Religion, *that God in all things was to be Obeyed.* And this Perſwaſion was the Root of all his Piety and Submiſſion to the Will of God. Upon this he left his own Country for a ſtrange Land, and followed the Clue of God's Providence whitherſoever it led him; it directed his ſteps when he knew not whither he went, and put him into a poſture of Undertaking the Hardeſt Tryals, and giving any proof of his Sincerity that God ſhould demand of him. And accordingly when God demanded his Son, the Deareſt thing he had in the World, tho' it was againſt the Law of Nature in any Caſe but his, to ſlay an Innocent Youth: Tho it was in common eſteem a Contradiction to all the Kindneſs and Tenderneſs which a Fathers Name carries in it, and no leſs contrary to the Endearments of the Conjugal Relation? Nay, though it had all the Viſible Marks of Unnatural Rage and Inhumanity upon it, and was like to prove an Indelible Blemiſh to Religion; tho' theſe

these considerations were no less Obvious than Weighty, yet was *Abraham* (through the Constancy of his Faith and Obedience) so Naturaliz'd to the Service of God, that nothing could divert him from it.

But I confess this does not fully clear the main Difficulty implyed in the Text, *Viz.* That *Abraham* should offer up his Son by Faith, while he Believed the Promises concerning his Seed, it being against common Sense or Reason, That if *Isaac* dyed without Issue, His Seed should be Blessed after him. So that *Abraham* might be a strong Believer, and do great things by his Faith, yet still it does not appear but that he must needs stagger, while he shook the very Ground and Foundation which his Faith and Hope had rested upon, as he did when he went about to destroy the promised Line, and so Cut off all the Blessings that depended upon it. Let us therefore have recourse to the second Notion of Faith, and Consider it as it signifies.

2. Some special and Eminent Act of this Grace: And such we find in the present case, namely a strong Persua-

sion,

ſion of *Abraham* of the Power of God to raiſe up *Iſaac* from the dead. And to this the context expreſly aſcribes his ſucceſs: By faith *Abraham*, when he was tried, offered up *Iſaac*, &c. *Accounting* (ſaith the Apoſtle) *that God was able to raiſe him up even from the dead*; *i. e.* that he had Power to fulfill his Promiſe by bringing *Iſaac* to Life again, and that he would certainly do it, rather than ſuffer the leaſt tittle of his promiſe to Dye with him. And now his Way, tho' hard, was clear and open; and there was nothing to Interrupt his Obedience but what his Almighty Faith could deal withal. He had doubtleſs conſidered, that God had a better Intereſt in his Son, and all his other Poſſeſſions, than any he could lay claim unto: And the great Reverence he had for his Wiſdom and Soveraignty, Huſh't his Natural Affections; and whereas God's Command ſeem'd to Oppoſe his promiſes, he overcame the Difficulty too, Believing that God was able to Reconcile them, and bring back *Iſaac* from the Dead by the ſame Power that gave him his Firſt Being, when he ſprang from One (as

V. 19.

is

is observed in this Chapter) that was as Good as Dead, that is Himself that had Out-lived the Natural Power of giving Life to others.

v. 12. We see then the Eminency of *Abrahams* Faith, and the support it gave him all along in his Tryal. By the Direction of it he kept his Eye all the while upon God's Command, and Wink't at all the seeming contradictions that Oppos'd his Obedience to it. He doubted not but that God had Power to Kill, and to make alive: To Command what he pleased, and Reward those that Diligently Seek and Obey him. In short, amidst all the hard things that bore upon *Abrahams* Faith, there was nothing appeared so Incredible to him, as that God should lye, or so unreasonable as to suspend his Obedience while he was Perswaded of God's Faithfulness to him; And accordingly he immediately followed him in the Light and strength of his Faith, without any Faultering or Regret; through all the Dark Scenes of that Cloudy Providence, which led him to the Sacrifice of his Only Son: And that after a most Expres's and Emphatical

phatical Promiſe, that in *Iſaac* his Seed ſhould be called.

And now 'tis time for us to Conſider how far we are concerned in this Diſcourſe, both in reference to our Faith and Practice. *Firſt* then,

1. Hence we Learn the true Nature of Juſtifying Faith, there being nothing plainer in Scripture, than that *Abrahams* Faith was Imputed to him for Righteouſneſs, which certainly it had never been, if he had not Obeyed the Command which was the Tryal of his Faith. If *Abraham* then was Juſtifyed by the Faith which offered up his Son, 'tis clear, that he was juſtifyed by a lively and working Faith. And that no other Faith than this can Juſtify, is evident if we conſider, that *Abrahams* Faith is more than once Recommended in Scripture as the great Pattern and Exemplar of the Faith which Juſtifies, and that the Great Commendation of it lies in the Influence it had upon the Holineſs and Obedience of his Life. And then, if we have not the ſame kind of Faith, that is, a Faith which makes us Obedient to the Will of God, we have

not that true and genuine Faith which Juſtifies. And therefore if we Believe, but do not obey the Truth, we muſt needs fall as ſhort of the Favour of God as we do of the Faith of *Abraham*. For to ſpeak freely, I cannot underſtand what Uſe there is of Faith, but to quicken us to do the Will of God, in order to our obtaining his Favour; And if this be the proper and only good Uſe of Faith, it follows, that if we ſeparate Faith from Holineſs and Obedience, it loſes all the Virtue which it hath to Juſtify us: And then, if we are never ſo Orthodox in Points of Faith, what does it Profit, my Brethren? Can that Faith ſave us, which cannot procure our acceptance with God? Have not all Wicked Men that Believe the Truths of Chriſtianity the ſame? *Nay the Devils* (as St. *James* obſerves) *Tremble* under as good a Faith as this. *Jam.* 2. 19.

'Tis ſtrange therefore, that any Man of Competent Reaſon ſhould think that a Dry and Barren Faith, a Volatil notion in the Head, that never Reaches the Heart and Life, ſhould put him into the happieſt ſtate that

that he can possibly attain to in this Life; Or that which makes him never the better Man, should yet make him the Favourite of God; That a Dead and Useless Faith should do him the greatest Kindness in the World, and Intitle him to Life Eternal.

Now if Justifying Faith be more than an Assent to Truth, if besides this it be a Vital Principle of Vertue and Holiness, we see what a perfect Dream the *Antinomian Doctrine* of Justification from Eternity is. For surely no Man was Justifyed by Faith so long ago, as from Eternity: And if we were justifyed from Eternity, our Faith comes too late to justify us, and then there can be no such thing as justifying Faith. And this the Patrons of this Opinion do not dissemble in their Descriptions of Faith, in which they represent it as a means only of Manifesting and Applying to themselves their Personal justification from Eternity. And is not this a fair step to the laying aside of the whole Gospel? For let any Impartial Man judge, what effect the Great Precepts and Motives of the Gospel are like to have upon

thoſe Men that conceive they have but one thing to do, to ſatisfy themſelves that they are in a juſtified ſtate, and that is to Believe Roundly that they were ſo from Eternity.

2. We are taught by this Tryal not to ſtagger or Repine, at any ſharp or Myſterious Providences, but to look upon them as the Wiſe Methods of God to prove our Sincerity, and to exerciſe our Faith in him. Of all the Excellent Men in Scripture, there is none that was honoured with more Eminent Tokens of Divine Favour and Acceptance, than *Abraham* was. He was ſtyled the Friend of God, the Fa-
Rom. 4. 13. ther of the Faithful Seed, and the Heir of the World: He was Familiarly Viſited by Angels from Heaven, and Dignify'd with many ſpecial Revelations and glorious Promiſes; He was
Gen. 18. 17 the Keeper of Gods Secrets, one whom he declared his Confidence in: Yea, was ſo Highly in his Favour, that God engaged himſelf by a Covenant with him to preſerve true Religion in his Family in all future Ages, and gave
Joh. 8. 56. him a Proſpect of the Day of Chriſt, at almoſt two thouſand Years Diſtance from

from it. And besides this Instance, it has been no Unusual thing with God to single out the Best men for the sharpest Tryals, and to propose them as examples of Faith and *Patience* to their own and all succeeding Generations, as appears by the rest of the Worthies of this Chapter, and the best Histories of all Ages. Now shall we call this an Errour of Providence, and conclude that all these Excellent Men were cast out of Gods Favour and Protection, because he call'd them to such Noble Tryals for the Honour and Vindication of their *Faith*? If not, we can infer nothing either against our selves, (while we study to please God) or against the Equity and goodness of his Providence, from the Troubles and Perplexities of this present Life, how extraordinary soever they may be for the Nature or Circumstances of them. We should consider rather, that good Men are the fittest to serve the Great ends of Providence, and to teach the World Submission to the Appointments of it, by their Afflictions and Tryals: And this clears at once the Wisdom and goodness of God in thus

training them up for those excessive Heights of Glory, which are prepared in Heaven for them.

3. The Carriage of *Abraham* in this Tryal may serve to convince the World that there is such a thing as Living by Faith; that is, serving God without Respect to Worldly Advantages, nay in view of the greatest Losses and disappointments that can be sustained by it. The looser part of Mankind has been always very apt to charge the sincere with pretending Religion for secular ends. Being willing to ease themselves of the shame of their wicked and Impious Lives, they would faign have the World believe, that there is no such thing as true Faith and Piety: That 'tis nothing but *Hypocrisie*, that gives some men the Reputation of being better than others: And that the Best love the World at their Hearts, as dearly as those that Proclaim their Passion for it, and professedly make their Court to it. And the truth is, it has cost the Servants of God very dear in their several Ages, to Undeceive the World in this matter, and to Vindicate the Honour of Religion

against

against the Scoffs and Infidelity of Men. For I doubt not but one special end of the Tryals and Sufferings of Good Men, is to convince the World that Religion is a Reality, and that there are those that chearfully serve God upon the Faith and Hope of a Better Life, yea, tho' it cost them their very dearest Delights and Comforts in this. The Example in the Text is a Demonstration of this beyond all possibility of Evasion or Answer. And since *Abrahams* Children have the same Kind of Faith, which he himself was so Renowned for, I mean a Faith which carries them through the service of God, in Pursuit of a Heavenly Country, and a Kingdom which hath Foundations, this vindicates all True Believers to the end of Time, from the Foul charge of Hypocrisie, and doing their Works to be seen of Men. 'Tis the Character of their Family, *That they Believe him that is Invisible: That they live by Faith and not by Sense, and are all of them Men and Women, of the same Spirit and Ingenuity, tho' not in the same Perfection that* Abra-

ham *was*. And that there is, and always will be ſuch a Family in the Earth, is as evident as the Covenant which God made with *Abraham*, when the Church was impaled in his little Family, and the Promiſe of our Saviour to His,, *That the Gates of Hell ſhall not prevail againſt it.* And therefore they that are, and know that they are ſincere, have no reaſon to value the Cenſures of Men. 'Tis enough that they ſeek to pleaſe God, and that he Knows their Integrity; for God is infinitely more than all the World beſides; and if we are ſincere, he cannot Judge otherwiſe of us; and then we are ſafe; our Reward is ſure, and will be great in Heaven. We need not ask leave of Men to be what we are, or ſtand to their Courteſy to bring us into Favour with him that Judgeth Righteouſly; 'Tis enough in all reaſon, That God and our Conſciences are Ready to Acquit us.

4. Laſtly, The ſucceſs of this Tryal ſhould Inſpire us with Zeal and Reſolution to ſerve and pleaſe God in all inſtances of Obedience to him. There is no Duty too hard for a vigorous and Lively

Lively Faith: There is none but what the Servants of God have diſcharged before us. And when we reflect upon what our great Examples have done, and conſider how nobly they have acquitted themſelves in the ſame Race that is ſet before us, why ſhould we not aſpire to be as brave and Reſolute as they were; and to break through the Diſcouragements which could not hinder them from Running and finiſhing their Courſe with Joy? Did they Climb over the higheſt Difficulties? And may not we be aſhamed to couch under the ordinary hardſhips in Religion? Did they depend upon God, when nothing but Miracles could Relieve their hopes in him? And ſhall we diſtruſt his goodneſs and Protection while we actually enjoy them, and he is pleas'd to continue ſo many Viſible Tokens of his Favour and Concernment for us? Did they leave their Country at God's Command? And ſhall we think it too much but to leave the Vices of ours, which have long threatned to turn us out of Poſſeſſion of it? Again, did they ſtick at nothing to pleaſe God, not ſo much as at the

Offering

Offering of an Only Son? And shall we that have Better Promises than they had, Refuse him so Reasonable a Service, as to offer up our Souls and Bodies in holy Flames of Devotion and Love, which is the perfect and indisputable Will of God, and therefore must be extreamly acceptable to him.

'Tis true, *That without Faith it is Impossible to please God*: But sure it is not Impossible to Believe, and so by vertue of our Faith to obey and please him; For this is the Argument of the whole Discourse in this Chapter, which out of the Sacred Annals of the Primitive Church, presents us with a Catalogue of many Eminent Believers, who became the favourites of God by their Faith and Obedience to him. And what is the Natural consequence of this? But that we, who have the same and in some Respects much greater Advantages than they had, should endeavour to shew the same greatness of Mind, and Invincible Resolution in Gods Service?

To Conclude, we have an Incomparable Pattern of Faith and Piety in the Text, *Abraham* the Friend of God, laying

laying himself at his Foot, and his Son upon his Altar, in Obedience to his Soveraign Will and Pleasure. How much more should we at Gods Command Sacrifice our Darling Lusts, that would destroy our Souls, since one of the two must dye? And this is a Sacrifice much cheaper, and no less Acceptable to God than *Abrahams* Oblation was: More grateful to him than *thou-thousands of Rams, or ten thousand Rivers of Oyl, Than if thou gavest thy First-born for thy Transgression, the Fruit of thy Body for the sin of thy Soul:* Offer this as the First fruits of thy Faith, without which, thy very *Prayers will be turned into sin.* Then shalt thou have favour in the sight of God, through the meritorious Sacrifice of his only Son; and by walking before him as *Abraham* did, may'st assuredly hope, after a short Tryal of thy Faith and Patience in this World, to sit down with *Abraham, Isaac.* and *Jacob*, and all the Faithful in the Kingdom of God. Micah. 6. 7, 8.

Which

Which God of his Infinite Mercy grant we may all do, through the Merits and Mediation of his Son Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father, and the Holy Spirit, be Ascribed all Honour and Glory, Dominion and Power, now and for ever, Amen.

SERMON

Sermon II.

ON

The Danger of a Miſ-inform'd Conſcience, or miſtaken Principles in Religion.

Acts 26. 9.

I verily thought with my ſelf, That I ought to do many things contrary to the Name of Jeſus *of* Nazareth.

THESE Words are part of the Confeſſion of an Eminent Convert to the Chriſtian Religion, A man of Learning and Zeal, and Conſcience: That

that had the Benefits of a Religious Education, and of great natural Endowments, and that made a more than an ordinary figure both in the Jewish and Christian Church. In the former he was a Ring-leader of the Sect of the Pharisees: A Sect, which perhaps till the Days of *Ignatius Loyola*, never had its equal in the World. And as the Pharisees of any party among the Jews were known to be the keenest against the Christians, so he owns himself to have been as errant a Pharisee, as hearty and as eager a Persecutor, as any of his Order. He was the Man by his own Confession, that shut up many of the Saints in Prison, and when they were put to Death for their Religion, he gave his Voice against them. Others he Punisht often in the Synagogues, and compell'd them to Blaspheme *i. e.* to Renounce their Faith in Christ, and to Curse him: Using the same Cruelty towards them which the Heathen Governours afterwards did; and those that refused this horrid Treachery to their Lord, he Persecuted into strange, that is, Heathen Cities. These things were contrary indeed

ver. 10. 11.

Plin. Ep. Tra. de Christian.

deed (and one would think ſhould be always ſo eſteem'd) to the Name of Jeſus. But there is one thing in St. *Pauls* Confeſſion which appears to be ſtranger than all this: And that is, that it was his Judgment and Conſcience that made him thus ſevere to the Chriſtians, and his Zeal to God and Religion that rais'd the Perſecution againſt them. It was it ſeems the prevailing ſenſe of his Mind, a Caſe he had determined within himſelf, that he ought to run down the Religion of Jeſus. So he tells the King and Court in theſe Words, *I verily thought with my ſelf, that I ought to do many things contrary to the Name of* Jeſus *of* Nazareth.

A hearty Champion you ſee, he had been againſt the Chriſtian Religion: But how came he to fall into an Opinion, and to Eſpouſe a Principle, that the worſt Religion might well be aſhamed of? The true account of it is, St. *Paul* had been a Right-bred Pharifee, having ſuckt in the Principles of that Superſtitious Sect in his Childhood, and lived (till he became a Chriſtian) exactly according to them, as *Acts* 23.6.

he

he tells King *Agrippa* in the hearing of the Jews at the fifth Verſe of this Chapter. And therefore what he charges himſelf with, we are not to look upon as his own private perſwaſion only, but rather as an inſtance of the general ſentiment of the Men of his way, and indeed as the Natural brood and Iſſue of Phariſaical Superſtition.

By Superſtition I mean a groundleſs Apprehenſion of pleaſing God by doing things which he never commanded, or forbearing thoſe which he hath no where Forbidden. And this was the πρῶτον ψεῦδος, the great and leading Error of the Phariſees. They added to the written Word of God, and made more Duties and ſins than ever the Law had made. Their Traditions, which had nothing to recommend them but the Cuſtom of their Fathers, they eſteemed equal at leaſt to the Divine Commandments; Nay our Saviour expreſly tells us, *They made the Commandments of God of no effect by their Traditions*; as if they thought to pleaſe him better in their own way than in His: And reckon'd

Reckon'd they advanc'd themſelves above others, by what they did over and above their Duty, as much in his as they did in their own Opinion And hence Conformity to their Traditional Rites, was their meaſure of Improvement and Perfection in Religion, as appears by St. *Pauls* Character of himſelf, *Gal.* 1. 14. *I profited in the Jews Religion above many of my Equals in my own Nation, being more exceedingly Zealous of the Tradition of my Fathers.* Which words, if we obſerve their connexion with thoſe immediately before them, ſeem to come in as the Reaſon, why *beyond meaſure* (as he there tells us) *he Perſecuted the Church of God and waſted it*; *i. e.* His mighty Zeal for the Unſcriptural Doctrines of the Phariſees, was the true ground of his Bitter and furious Zeal againſt the Profeſſors of the True Religion. And this is the rather to be noted, becauſe it ſhews us the Spirit and Genius of that Sect, that had the chief hand in bringing our Saviour to his Croſs, and *firſt conſpired* the *ruine* of *Chriſtianity*.

From the Words thus explained, the matter I would crave leave to Propoſe to your ſerious conſiderations is this. That the Conſciences of Men may be ſo far

miſ-guided by Erroneous Principles, and an Affectation of things in which Religion does not conſiſt, as to encourage them to the fierceſt oppoſition, to the expreſs Revelations of God, and the *truths* of *Jeſus*. Or more briefly thus: That Chriſtianity is liable to the ſharpeſt Oppoſition from Men, under the higheſt Pretence of Zeal and Conſcience towards God and Religion.

In ſpeaking to this Subject my Deſign is,

1. To confirm the truth of this Obſervation.

2. To ſhew whence it is that Men are liable to be thus Miſguided by Erroneous Principles, and tranſported with this Extravagant and Deſtructive Zeal.

3. To make ſome Inferences that may be Uſeful to our ſelves.

1. For the confirmation of this Truth: That the Conſciences of Men may be thus Miſguided, and their Spirits Inflamed by Erroneous Principles againſt the Truth, may appear from our Saviours Character of his, and his Churches Enemies, and from many plain and undeniable Inſtances Parallel to this of the Confeſſor in the Text.

1. From

1. From our Saviours Character of His and his Churches Enemies. Our Bleſſed Lord, fore-ſeeing what a zealous Oppoſition his Church and Doctrine would aſſuredly meet withal after his deceaſe, takes occaſion a little before his Paſſion to fore-warn his Diſciples of it. He had often told them in the general, *That they muſt look for Trouble and Perſecution from Men.* Now the time of Tryal drawing on, to prevent the damp of a Surpriſal, he Deſcribes the temper and Spirit of their Enemies, and ſhews them what hard meaſure they and their Followers muſt expect from them: *They ſhall put you out of the Synagogues,* (*i. e.* excommunicate and curſe you for Hereticks) *yea the time cometh, That whoſoever Killeth you will think that he doth God ſervice,* John 16. 2. It ſeems to kill a Diſciple for his Religion, was in the judgment of theſe Men, like the Worſhiping of God by Sacrifice. *They ſhall think by it* (ſaith our Saviour) λατρείαν προσφέρειν τῷ Θεῷ, *to perform a grateful Service or Sacrifice to God*: As if they knew no better way of pleaſing him, than by takeing a Lamb out of his own Flock, and making it an Oblation to him. Now

this is certainly a very ſtrange way of ſerving God, and ſuch as men would never have thought of, if they had not Deify'd ſomething more than him, and changed the Glory of the Holy and Merciful God into a direful Image of their own Temper and Complexion, whom they Worſhip inſtead of him. And as I doubt not but the Jews were primarily intended in this Prophecy, ſo to the Infinite Scandal of Chriſtianity, there is unanſwerable Reaſon to think that many that ſhelter themſelves under the Sacred Profeſſion of it, are very deeply concerned in it; ſure I am, that all the Marks of this Prophecy, the ſame Religious zeal, expreſt by the ſame rage, rancour, and cruelty, are very freſh and eaſie to be ſeen upon them.

2. By many plain and Undeniable Inſtances Parallel to that we meet with in the Text. The Apoſtles Confeſſion was indeed a ſingular thing, But for the Crimes which he taxeth himſelf with, he might as juſtly have charged his Nation with them, the main Body of the Jewiſh Church, eſpecially the governing part of it, being ſtrangely Leavened with this Sowre and Deſtructive

tive zeal. *They had a zeal for God* (as St. *Paul* himſelf Teſtifies of them) *but not according to knowledge*; for they knew not his Immence Goodneſs and Benignity to Mankind, nor his only begotten Son, when he was amongſt them. They had a zeal for the Law, but ſo they preſumed to call what ever they had made Law by their Gloſſes and Traditions, and directed it againſt thoſe that had a zeal againſt them. And a very fierce and fatal zeal it was; A zeal that Crucifyed the Lord of Life: That threw the Apoſtles into Priſons, That cleared the Synagogues of them and their Diſciples: That Crampt and Loaded them with Chains and Fetters, and for a *good work* gave forty Stripes ſave one. A zeal that ſuborned Witneſſes, and breathed out Threatnings and ſlaughter againſt Men of whom the World was not worthy; a zeal that liſted Men into Conſpiracies, and bound them under an Oath to Kill an Innocent Perſon. An outragious zeal it was, that made Men exceedingly Mad, as one that had too much experience of it, tells us (*viz. 11th.* of this Chapter) ſo mad, as to think they *ought to do many things contrary to the cleareſt Revelations of God and the Name of* Jeſus.

Nor is this kind of Zeal Peculiar to the temper of the Jewiſh Nation. There are thoſe in the World, that would be thought the only Good Chriſtians, who roundly Excommunicate all other Churches for not complying with their Dictates as eſſentiael to Chriſtianity, which the Scripturs and the next Ancient and venerable Writings do aſſure us are not. There are thoſe that call us Hereticks, (and have often proved us ſo, as clearly as Fire and Faggot can do it) becauſe we are ſo ſtrait-laced as to Believe but juſt ſo many Truths and Articles of Faith, as were at firſt delivered to the Saints: And are ſo Nice and Humorous as not to Believe the flatteſt contradictions to them. There is a Church that for ſeveral Ages, and in ſeveral Councils, hath Decreed the Extirpation of Hereticks (*i. e.* the moſt Orthodox Chriſtians) by Fire and Sword, and fairly Recommended it as an Eminent Teſt of Catholick Zeal. Others (at leaſt) there have been, who with mighty Confidence pretended to ſecret motions and Immediate Warrants from Heaven, to Worry and Deſtroy all that ſhould withſtand them and their *Doctrin*.

I might tire you with inſtances of both

both kinds, and make it appear that the Zeal of Chriſtians againſt One another hath in point of Fierceneſs and Cruelty, far exceeded the Pattern in the Text.

For the Proof of this, I might but deſire you to take a ſhort Review of the Ruines which Romiſh Zeal, hath made in Proteſtant Countries, from our own to the very borders of the *Ottoman* Empire. To keep neareſt home; I might appeal to the Holy League of *France* for the Utter Extirpation of the Reform'd Religion: And to the Barbarous Uſage of more than many Thouſand Chriſtians in the United Provinces, I mean, before the Quarrel began with the Civil Government. I might refer you to Inquiſitions, Invaſions and Maſſacres; to the Burning Zeal of the *Marian* days, and the Powder Conſpiracy here in *England*, that Maſter-piece of Inhumanity, deſign'd, no doubt, to make amends for the long Peace and Tranquility we enjoyed under the Pious and gentle Reign of our Immortal Virgin Queen. After theſe, it were cold and endleſs to mention all the Impious and Unnatural Artifices of the Agents of *Rome* againſt the Lives of our Princes, the felicity of our Government,

Grot. Annal. lib. 1.

Foulis Hiſt. of Romiſh Treaſons and Uſurp.

and the Vitals of our Religion. One thing in the general you may obſerve, that when ever the Church of *Rome* hath loſt any thing by dint of Argument, ſhe hath preſently betaken her ſelf to ſharper and deadlier Weapons for the Recovery of it. And methinks it is the leaſt of Wonders, that a Church-Pamper'd with Power and Wealth and Honours, that thinks her ſelf fit to give Law to the whole Chriſtian World, and that it is her Unqueſtionable Right and Duty by all poſſible means to do it, ſhould not wave her Principles, and content her ſelf to admoniſh and Weep over Obſtinate Hereticks, (as our Bleſſed Lord did over *Jeruſalem*), when her deſigns call for Blood and Cruelty, and 'tis apparent that Men will not be made Obedient without them. On the other hand, there has been another ſort of men that under pretence of Refining the Reformation have ſhamefully violated the Pure and Undefiled Religion that came from Heaven. And for this, I might refer you to the Wicked Outrages of the *Anabaptiſts* at *Munſter*, and the Terrible Battles which have been fought for little Phanſies, and affected ſingularities in Religion.

Religion. I might call to your Remembrance the many Inſurrections, and (what I even Tremble to ſpeak of) the horrid Murther of the late Arch-Biſhop in *Scotland.* I might deſire you to reflect upon the fierce and bloody Attempts, which in our Memory and Nation have been managed upon the *fifth Monarchy Principles.* In a word, I might carry you to the Tombs of Kings, Nobles, and Prelates, of worthy Patriots and Miniſters of Juſtice, of Preachers and Ambaſſadors of Peace, who by hands lifted up to Heaven, have been Offered (to uſe the Apoſtles Phraſe) upon the Sacrifice and Service of your *Faith, which ſome call Hereſie, and according to which we now Worſhip the God of our Fathers.*

Now to apply theſe Alluſions to the purpoſe of the Text, I ſhall only obſerve to you, that the chief Actors and Parties in them have at one time or other confeſt, that they verily thought they were engaged in a good Cauſe; many Apologies have been made, and many Volumes have been written for them; Yea, many have ſealed it with their Blood, and pronounc't it with their

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laſt breath, that the things they did, and Dyed for, as ill as they look'd towards the World, were done out of Zeal to God and Religion; that is, they *thought they ought to have done them*, as contrary and Diſhonourable as they really were, to the Name of *Jeſus*.

I come now in the ſecond place,

2. To ſhew whence it is that Men are liable to be thus Miſguided by Erroneous Principles, and Tranſported with this Extravagant and deſtructive Zeal. I confeſs, 'tis very natural to men to be warm and zealous for their own Doctrines and Sentiments, in ſo much that they that have the Truth on their ſide, have not always the Charity and Good-Nature that ſhould attend it. But that this Inclination ſhould ſo mightily raiſe the Spleen, and fire the Spirits of Men: That it ſhould grow ſo violent, Quarrelſome, and Impetuous, as to *ſcorn* the Reſtraint of Laws both Divine and Humane, and break down all the Fences of Government, to ſet up the Kingdom of Chriſt, *which is not of this World*; That the Diſciples of ſo meek a Maſter as our Saviour was, and the Profeſſors of ſo Charitable and obliging, ſo

Holy

Holy and Healing an Inſtitution as Chriſtianity is, ſhould think themſelves Bound to promote every Crude Opinion with the Sword, Nay, that inſpired and (as they call themſelves) *Infallible* Men, ſhould be ſo much out of the way, ſo exceedingly fierce, and angry with all that are not of their Minds, as to devote them to Preſent and Eternal Ruine: Theſe things are ſo extreamly full of Scandal and Contradiction, that without a Demonſtration of the Truth, it were ſcarce Charity to believe the poſſibility of them. But let us do that Right to Chriſtianity and our ſelves, as to ſee where the fault lyes, and what it is that under the pretence of Conſcience, has wrought ſo much Miſery and Confuſion in the Chriſtian World.

To aſſign all the cauſes of theſe Evils, would require more Time and Patience than the preſent occaſion will allow. I ſhall therefore confine my ſelf to ſuch as I think have the greateſt Intereſt in them, and are beſt able to anſwer for them.

1. The firſt is Bad Education: which has a ſtrange Influence upon the Spirits and Perſuaſions of Men, and is able to change

change the ſweeteſt natural Diſpoſitions into the Bittereſt and fierceſt Tempers. The great Spring and Mover of Humane Actions in the Judgment of the Mind, and therefore the firſt Information of the Judgment, which is the Buſineſs of Education, muſt have a mighty ſtroke in the Conduct of the Life of Man; and the rather becauſe the Impreſſions we receive of things, while our Minds are free from all ſuſpition and Prejudice, are commonly the Deepeſt moſt laſting and indelible. And hence it is, that Men are generally very apt to ſtick to their firſt Principles, be they true or falſe, and for want of due enquiry how they came by them, to take them for Divine Impreſſions and Eternal Truths. And thus an Erroneous Conſcience Uſurps the Authority of a Guide, the ordinary effect of which, is a zealous Oppoſition againſt all that ſtand in its way, or preſume to Check and diſturb the Dictates of it. For what ever ought to be, it is plain that Mens preſent Thoughts and Principles are and will be the Rule of their Actions; and that the worſe any Principles are, and the Earlier they are Inſtilled into them,

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under the Notion of Divine Truths, the more ſtrongly they Impregnate their Minds, and excite them to purſue the Tendencies of them. And therefore we need not much wonder at thoſe, who are bred up in a Religion contrary to the Truth, as it is in Jeſus, and to his Commandments of Love, Peace and Unity: Who are taught from their Cradles to call us Hereticks, and to ſpeak the bittereſt things againſt us, to Break their Faith with us, and to mark us out for Deſtruction, if in proceſs of time they grow expert in all the Arts of Confuſion, and with undaunted Courage Undertake the Boldeſt Crimes, which their Party and Principles do Countenance the Practice of.

'Tis true, the Prejudices of Education are not invincible, if Men would take a right courſe to overcome them: But this is a rare caſe, and there are but few, in Compariſon of thoſe that chooſe to enjoy their Errors, that are willing to make a Tryal of it. And indeed, when our green and tender Minds are once warpt by falſe and Pernicious Principles, it is no eaſy matter to bring them ſtreight, and to put them into a right Poſture again.

gain. It requires a great deal of Conſideration and Impartial inquiry into the Reaſon and bottom of things, which ſome Men want abilities of mind, others Leiſure, Humility, Patience, and Integrity to carry them through: And the want of any of theſe is enough to anſwer for their obſtinate perſiſting in their Firſt Errours, and unreaſonable Oppoſition to the Truth.

2. Affected Ignorance of the Truth, naturally hardens Men in their Evil Principles, and diſpoſes them to approve of any Rugged and violent Courſe to keep up the Reputation of them. The *Jews* in our Saviour's time had the greateſt Advantages that ever Men enjoyed of being delivered from the Chains and Fetters of an ill Education, or (as St. *Peter* calls it) *From their vain Converſation received by Tradition from their Fathers.* They had the Brighteſt Revelations of the Divine Nature and Will that ever came from Heaven: And thoſe delivered to them by their own *Meſſiah*, whom they had long expected: In whom all the Promiſes concerning that Infinite Bleſſing to Mankind were exactly fulfilled: Who wrought the greateſt and

1 Pet. 1. 18.

moſt

moſt Aſtoniſhing Miracles that ever the World beheld: Who gave them a Perfect Comment on the Law, which had been miſerably Corrupted by the Gloſſes of their Scribes and Doctors, and layed open their Hypocriſies to themſelves and all the People; and yet ſo Blind and Sottiſh were they, as to reject all his Admonitions with Spight and Scorn, to *Love Darkneſs rather than Light*, to Admire their Deluders, and to Crucify their Guide to Eternal Bliſs and Happineſs. Our Saviour himſelf Teſtifies of them in the height of their Rage and Malice againſt him, *that they knew not what they did.* Luke 23. 34. They had been Taught their *Meſſiah* ſhould be a Glorious King and Conquerour, and ſuch an One they muſt have or none. They had been long wonted to a Pompous and Ceremonious ſervice: And therefore could not bear the thoughts of having the Stately *Fabrick* of their Religion, Erected by God himſelf, and ſupported by *Moſes* and the Prophets, taken down by the *Carpenters* Son, as they ſtiled our Lord. Theſe were the Fatal Chains that held them faſt in that Dungeon of Darkneſs and Ignorance, which Paradiſe it ſelf could not Tempt them

them, nor the Son of God could not redeem them from.

And is not the ſame wilfull and Affected Ignorance ſtill to be found amongſt the Adverſaries of our Religion? Some think there ought to be an Infallible and Univerſal Head of the Church on Earth, and ſuch an one they will have what ever it coſts them. Others that are ſtrongly perſwaded of Chriſts Perſonal Reign upon Earth, think they ought to Fight for King Jeſus againſt all Oppoſers. And why is Ignorance ſo much Cheriſht and Applauded in the Church of *Rome*, but that it gives the Guides of that Church a mighty advantage to Mis-lead the People, and Embolden them to act any illthing they are pleaſed to Impoſe upon them? And this is the very uſe they make of it; they Teach them to call Evil Good, and Good Evil: to Invert the Nature of things, and to Fix the Croſſeſt Names they can deviſe upon them, and then Proſecute them directly contrary to their intrinſick merit: Juſt as the Heathens Cloath'd the Chriſtians in Beaſts Skins, and then expoſed them to be Worried by Wild Beaſts to Death. They firſt teach them to call our Religi-

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on Hereſie, which naturally creates an Implacable Hatred of it: And having gone thus far, they eaſily perſwade them they cannot be too Zealous to ſuppreſs it; the next ſtep to which Perſuaſion is to think any thing to be lawful that will do it, or if that will not do, it ſhall be Meritorious: And then to deſtroy Hereticks, follows of courſe to be a Glorious Work; But ſurely St. *Paul* did not think ſo, when he confeſt the contrariety of it to the Name of Jeſus. Nor did our Saviour think ſo, when he reproved the Raſh and Deſtructive zeal of his Diſciples, who would have conſumed the *Samaritans* by Fire from Heaven, telling them, *that they knew not what manner of Spirits they were of.* And after this, ſhould I preſume to ſay, that the Controverſies between us and the Church of *Rome*, have been managed with invincible ſtrength and demonſtration of the Truth on our ſide: Or ſhould I ſay, that no cauſe ſince the ſealing of the Scriptures (unleſs that of our common Chriſtianity) was ever better Defended than our departure from that Church, I ſhould not be aſhamed of this confidence of boaſting. Luke 9. 55.

3. Secular Intereſts have great Power to diſtort the Judgments of men, and to inflame their Paſſions againſt thoſe that differ from them in matters of Religion. What ever it is they place their chief ſatisfaction in, whether they are bound for the Port of Gain, or Honour or Liberty, we commonly find they make all the Sail that ever they can to come ſpeedily to it. If the way to attain their ends be to appear ſtoutly for this, or that Party or Perſuaſion, they will readily do it, and ſerve the cauſe to the Utmoſt, if they happen to thrive by it. Men of corrupt Minds and deſtitute of the Truth, do not uſe to be Baſhful in aſſerting their Principles when they find their Intereſts in them: But ſuppoſing Gain to be Godlineſs (as the Apoſtle obſerves of them) are generally very forward to ſhew their good Affection to it, and like *Demetrius*, to put the World into an uproar, out of zeal to the Magnificence of their Great *Diana*, and their Profits from her Shrines and Altars. Conſcience 'tis true, at the firſt, has the leaſt ſhare in the Actions of theſe Men, whoſe Intereſts chooſe their Principle for them: But what they ſtrongly Affect, and deſire

1 Tim. 6. 5.

sire should be true, in time they strongly believe; and having willfully Rejected the Truth, are given up by the Just Judgment of God to their own Delusions, to Believe and defend the Lye.

4. Some Principles are so bad in themselves, as to inspire men with a furious and Unchristian Zeal, and without the help of Worldly Interest to instigate and push them on to violent and Unnatural Actions. Such are those which Warrant the Killing of men for Christs sake and the Gospels, and promise them Heaven for the Vilest Practices in the World: For Assassinating their Natural Prince, Betraying their Country, and putting it under a Foreign and insupportable Yoke. Such are all those that make Unlawful and indifferent things absolutely Necessary to Salvation, and encourage Men to think the better of themselves for their Zeal against such as pretend to nothing but the plain Rules of Christianity, and a Decent Way of serving of God in Spirit and in Truth. These Principles do naturally produce an Envious and Ill-na-

tur'd Zeal: 'Tis the property of thoſe that are under the Power and Guidance of them, to allow no Man a Name for Religion but themſelves, to be angry with every one that do's not Eſpouſe their Follies, to Glory in their Marks of Diſtinction, and take themſelves to be the Holier and better men for Differing from all Chriſtians upon Earth.

And this is too often the effect of that odd and Peeviſh Principle, that Innocent and indifferent things ceaſe to be Lawful when they are once Commanded. No Man knows the malignity of ſuch an Errour as this, ſhould it once get the Aſcendant (which is the true Aim and Tendency of it) over that Authority which God hath placed in the Rulers of his Church. Do we not already find the Influence of it upon ſome of the ſtraiteſt Sect of our Religion, who yet have reſerved themſelves a ſufficient Latitude in Scorning and Deriding their Brethren, and are extreamly laviſh in their Cenſures of Perſons of the higheſt Character and Reverence in the Church of God? Nay, many there are that

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prize and commend themſelves upon theſe very Accounts, and look upon it as a mark of Sanctity, to Break and blemiſh the Communion of that Church, which they pretend no other Quarrel with, than only for interpoſing her Authority in ſome indifferent things, *i. e.* making uſe of the Power which Chriſt himſelf hath given to every Church, for the benefit and Edification of it. And what is this but to Conſecrate a Schiſm into a ſtate of Perfection, and to do that for Religions ſake, which directly tends to the undoing and ſubverſion of it?

5. *Enthuſiaſm*, or a falſe pretence to Divine Inſpiration, is a Fatal cauſe of this Extravagant Zeal. When men have the Confidence to aſcribe their Errors to the immediate Dictates of the Spirit: When they take themſelves to be the peculiar Favourites of God, in whoſe Breaſts he hath lodg'd his choiceſt Secrets, whom he hath choſen and authorized to bring his moſt glorious Deſigns to paſs, 'tis not to be expected they ſhould long content themſelves with the Pleaſure of theſe Delu-

ſions. That Evil Spirit, that hath blinded their Eyes, and taught them to Belye the Holy Ghoſt, has a farther Deſign upon them: And as the Philiſtines dealt with *Sampſon*, when they had put out his Eyes, will ſurely Employ them in his Drudgeries, and put them upon the moſt deſtructive Attempts. 'Tis hardly to be imagined what deſperate Projects men will freely contribute their Service to, when they are once poſſeſt with a Spirit of Deluſion, and ſtruck Blind with an Opinion, that whatever they ſtrongly Fancy is Infallibly ſo: That 'tis impoſſible for them to Err, having Private Inſtructions from God himſelf, hitherto hid from Ages and Generations, to Advance the Kingdom of Chriſt, and exalt it to a more glorious Height. To which purpoſe an Eminent Divine of this Church, who had a peculiar Sagacity in Tracing and detecting the Errours of his time) hath left us this memorable paſſage: * *When Men are once Erroneouſly perſuaded, that 'tis the Will of God to have thoſe things done which they Fancy, then Opinions are as Thorns in their ſides, never ſuffering them to take reſt 'till they have brought their Speculations in-*

* *Mr. Hook. Pref. to Eccl. Pol.*

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to Practice: The Impediments of which Practice their reſtleſs deſire and ſtudy to remove, leadeth them every Day into more dangerous Opinions, ſometimes quite and clean contrary to their firſt pretended meanings: So that what will grow out of ſuch Errours, as go mask'd under the Cloak of Divine Authority, impoſſible it is that ever the Wit of Man ſhould imagine, till time has brought forth the Fruits of them.

I Proceed now, in the third and laſt place,

3. To make ſome Inferences briefly from this Diſcourſe: From whence it will follow,

1. That we have no Reaſon, when we ſee the Effects of this Diſtructive and Unchriſtian Zeal, to be ſtagger'd in our Religion, or to ſuſpect our Faith. That the beſt Religion ſhould meet with the ſharpeſt Oppoſition from Men, that the worſt Actions ſhould pretend to ſerve it, and receive Authority and Encouragement from it, that Men of Learning and Knowledge, and of High and Extraordinary Zeal ſhould Combine againſt it, are no new things in the World. The Church from her Infancy has been acquainted with them, and our Saviour and his Apoſtles have expreſly foretold them,

on purpoſe that we ſhould not be Offended when we ſee and feel them.

2. Hence we learn, that an Erroneous Conſcience is a very unſafe and dangerous Guide. And it muſt needs be ſo, becauſe it is ſuppoſed to Dictate the mind of God, and by his Authority to guide our Practice. And accordingly the greateſt Troubles and Perſecutions which have befallen the Church, are manifeſtly Owing to the Deluſions which have paſt under the Name of Conſcience in ſeveral Ages; which ſhould mightily awaken us to look well to our Principles, and to keep our Minds Pure and untainted with Errour. *If the Light* (ſaith Chriſt) *that is in thee be Darkneſs, how great is that Darkneſs?* A little ſpeck in the Eye, fed by an Invincible Humour, often Deſtroys the moſt Uſeful and Noble Senſe: 'Tis ſad to obſerve from what ſmall beginnings the greateſt Errours both in Judgment and Practice have in a ſhort time ſpred and diffuſed themſelves to the infinite Prejudice of Chriſtianity, and the unſpeakable Trouble and diſhonour of the Church. To give you one Remarkable Inſtance of this: In the beginning of the Reformation in *Germany*. They

Mat. 6. 23.

Sleid. Com. lib. 10.

They, who firſt ſcrupled only the Doctrine of Infant Baptiſm, by degrees ſo Intangled themſelves in New and greater Errours, that in a few Years they grew the higheſt *Enthuſiaſts*, vented the Rankeſt Blaſphemies, and the moſt Fulſome Opinions: And after the faireſt ſhew of ſanctity and ſelf-denial, threw off all Humanity, Indulging themſelves in the moſt Beaſtial and Impudent vices; *in fine*, They Renounc't all Allegiance to their Lawful Superiours ſet up a Puppet King of their own, Dignified him with the Title of Univerſal *Monarch*, and to Compleat the Tragedy, Baptiz'd one another with their own Blood.

3. That the greateſt Zeal is no Evidence of the goodneſs of any Cauſe or Principles. While ſome contend as earneſtly againſt, as others do for the Truth, their Zeal can Determine nothing on either ſide. 'Tis the goodneſs of Principles, and the Merit of a Cauſe, that can only Juſtify our Zeal for them: If they be wanting, Zeal is no better than Rage and Frenzy. Therefore, ſaith the Apoſtle, Gal. 4. 18. *It is Good to be Zealouſly affected always in a good thing*; which Implies, that when our Zeal is not thus Qualified, it is good

for

for nothing: Or if it riſes above the Goodneſs of its Object, it ſo far overſhoots it ſelf, and Degenerates into Vice and Folly. And this is the Fault of thoſe that lay the Weight of Religion upon ſlender things; that can find nothing to ſpend their Zeal upon, but an Innocent Phraſe or Ceremony, that Diſpiſe Communion with a Church that does not hit their Phancy in every Punctilio, and ſeem (almoſt) contented the *Proteſtant* Religion ſhould ſink rather than the beſt ſupport of it ſhould ſtand, I mean, the Union of *Proteſtants* in our Eſtabliſh't National Religion. Theſe are Humours that Charity it ſelf can hardly Excuſe in them, or look upon as any other than the exceſſes of a miſtaken and Intemperate Zeal. In ſhort, Zeal is either the beſt Friend, or the keeneſt Enemy to Religion, for which reaſon we ought to look narrowly to the Grounds and Tendencies of it.

4. We ſee what reaſon we have to be aware of thoſe Perſons, who Teach and Promote ſuch Principles as are contrary to the True Spirit and Intereſt of Chriſtianity. I know not what can be ſaid worſe of any Religion, than that it

inſpires

inspires Men with Rage and Cruelty, Quenches the Spirit of Love and Meekness, and Represents God as the Author of Confusion, a Humourous and Discontented Being, that is never Pleased long with his own Prescriptions, and therefore must be sooth'd and flatter'd with something that is New and Fanciful, that looks like an Excess or Transport of Devotion, that is Owing to the Good-Will, or Ill-Nature of Men; such Religion as this can never reconcile it self to the Doctrine of Christianity, but will be supplanting it where-ever it comes: And the Zeal it infuses into Men, will (if not effectually restrained) Act over all those Dismal Tragedies again, of which the Christian Church has been almost the Constant Scene ever since the Foundation of it. We should therefore be jealous of it in all shapes: Whether it Pleads for Unity, as the Church of *Rome* do's, who takes her self to be the Only Church, and therefore Reprobates all that will not be United to her: Or whether it declares for Free-Grace, *i. e.* a Gospel without a Sanction, as the *German Antinomians* and *Ranters* did, who turn'd the Grace of God into Lasciviousness, and

and liv'd as if it taught them to deny themſelves no Ungodlineſs or Worldly Luſts; whether it pretends to Viſions and Revelations of the Lord, contrary to the Doctrines Received and delivered by his Apoſtles from him: Or whether it ſets up for Purity of Worſhip, in miſtaken or doubtful Inſtances, againſt the Peace of the Church, and contrary to the Wiſdom that is from above, which is *firſt Pure,* Jam. 3. 17. *then Peaceable, Gentle, and Eaſy to be intreated*: Not Peeviſh or implacable, not apt to Quarrel with Shadows, and much leſs to put three Kingdoms into a Flame for the ſake of three harmleſs Ceremonies.

5. Laſtly, Since Chriſtianity is liable to, and has endured ſo much Oppoſition from Men, we ſhould learn to adore Gods Infinite Widſom and Goodneſs in Preſerving his Truth, and Protecting his Church, againſt the Zealous Endeavours of their Enemies to ſtifle and deſtroy them. And certainly We of this Nation have ſeen as extraordinary Evidences of this kind, as ever any Chriſtian Nation did. Our deliverances have had ſo many viſible

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marks of a Divine and Peculiar Providence upon them, that one would think they ſhould at once clear the Nation of all Atheiſtical Dotage. Open the Eyes of its Divided Inhabitants, and Diſcourage its moſt zealous Adverſaries from Daring any longer that All-ſeeing Eye that hath ſo often diſcovered, from ſtrugling any more with that Omnipotent hand, that hath ſo ſeaſonably baffled their Cloſet and moſt perfidious Deſigns and Practices. And doubtleſs were we as ſenſible as we ought to be, of God's ſingular goodneſs towards us, in caſting us into the Boſom of a Church, where we have all advantages for Eternal Salvation, and in lengthening out our Peace and Tranquility in deſpight of our Enemies, we ſhould think it our Intereſt to leave our ſelves ſtill in his hands. I do not mean, by ſitting ſtill and neglecting our Guards, but by a patient continuance in Well-doing, by attempting nothing that is Unworthy of our excellent Religion: By a clear and genuine Zeal for the Honour of God our Saviour; by our Unfeigned thankfulneſs to him for his Wonderful

ful Mercies, by confiding in his Goodneſs and Protection; by the Fervency of our Prayers, and Interceſſions with him, and by mutual Exchanges of kindneſs and condeſcention to one another, in any thing that may truly promote our Common Intereſt: In a word, by adhering to the Old Principles of Chriſtianity, and avoiding the two dangerous Rocks of Superſtition and *Enthuſiaſm*, and what ever elſe is contrary to the Name of Jeſus.

Grant, O Lord, we beſeech thee, that the courſe of this World may be ſo Peaceably Ordered by thy Governance, that thy Church may Joyfully ſerve thee in all Godly quietneſs, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord.

SERMON

Sermon III.

Of the Different Diſpenſations of Grace, and of Impenitency under the beſt means of Salvation.

Matthew 11. 21, 22.

Wo unto thee Chorazin, *Wo unto thee* Bethſaida, *For if the Mighty Works which were done in you, had been done in* Tyre *and* Sidon, *they would have Repented long ago in Sack-cloth and Aſhes.*

But I ſay unto you, it ſhall be more tolerable for Tyre *and* Sidon *in the Day of Judgment, than for you.*

CHorazin and *Bethſaida*, were Cities of *Galilee*, ſituate on the Sea-Shore, not very far from the Coaſts of

of *Tyre* and *Sidon*. They profeſt the Jewiſh Religion, and had the Priviledge of hearing our Saviours Doctrine, and beholding his Miracles. But theſe Advantages they were ſo little the better for, that He upbraided them for their Unparallel'd Infidelity and hardneſs of Heart, repreſenting them as more obſtinate than the very Heathens about them: More averſe to their own Happineſs than their Neighbours of *Tyre* and *Sidon*, who had nothing but the weak Light of Nature to guide them to it. Theſe Gentiles had no Prophets or Scriptures to Inſtruct them, no Miracles to open their Eyes, no promiſes of Pardon or Eternal Life to encourage their Repentance: And yet our Saviour tells us, they were in a better diſpoſition to receive the Goſpel, and would much ſooner have repented at the ſight of his mighty Works, than the *Galileans* that had all the proper means to diſpoſe and Encline them to it. And this was the great aggravation of the ſin of theſe impenitent *Jews*, and the ground of the Threatning here Denounc't

nounc't against them: *Wo unto thee* Chorazin, *Wo unto thee* Bethsaida, *for if the mighty Works which were done in you, had been done in* Tyre *and* Sidon, *they had Repented*, &c.

Tho' there seems to be no great Difficulty in the meaning of these Words, yet (what ever be the Reason of it) there is a great Dispute amongst Interpreters about it: *viz*, Whether our Saviour means, that the effect of his Miracles upon *Tyre* and *Sidon* would have been the Real Conversion of those Cities; or whether by their Repenting in *Sackcloth* and *Ashes*, we are to understand no more than a meer External or *Counterfeit Repentance*. That the former of these is in several *respects* the more Natural Sense, as will sufficiently appear, if we Consider,

1. The Scope and Tenour of our *Saviour's* Discourse in this place. In the Verse before the Text the *Evangelist* tells us, that he then began to Upbraid the *Cities* where most of his

mighty Works were done, ὅτι οὐ μετενόησαν, *Becauſe they Repented not*, i. e. Truly and Heartily: As is clear by the Current Uſage of the Original Word in Scripture, and the moſt proper and Genuine Importance of it. Beſides, this was the only Repentance which Chriſt came to Convince the World of the abſolute neceſſity of, and this his Doctrine and Miracles were apt to produce in all that rightly weighed and obſerved them; and therefore if Chriſt Reproved the *Jews* for want of any Repentance, it muſt be for want of this. And from hence it follows, that when He Upbraids them with the Repentance of *Tyre* and *Sidon* in *Sackcloth* and *Aſhes*; his meaning muſt be, that theirs would have proved a True, Solemn, and Unfeigned Repentance. For, where is otherwiſe the Upbraiding, which the *Evangeliſt* ſpeaks of? If the *Tyrians* had continued Impenitent under the Preaching of the Goſpel, and in View of the mighty Works of our Saviour, they would have done juſt as the *Jews* did; and

if

if they had made a ſhew of Repenting, when they did not: Put *Sackcloth* upon their *Loins*, and *Aſhes* upon their *Heads*, when their Hearts were as hard, and their Luſts were as Rampant as ever, we may be ſure Chriſt would never have call'd this Repentance, which is all over *Hypocriſie*. Nor could this be any Reproach to the *Jews*, to hear that other Nations, had they been in their Circumſtances, would have proved as Wicked or worſe than they. No man thinks it any ſhame to him to be told, that others are every whit as Bad and Vicious as Himſelf: This is not to Aggravate and Upbraid, but rather to ſtroak and Extenuate his Crimes, by ſhewing the Commonneſs of them, and the great Aptitude of Humane Nature to fall into them. Briefly, our Saviour's ſaying to the Men of *Galilee*, *That it would be more Tolerable for* Tyre *and* Sidon *in the Day of Judgment than for them*, plainly Refers to the good diſpoſition

of those Cities to Repent of their Lewdness and Idolatry, and Embrace the Gospel. To which may be added.

2. That the Conversion of these very Nations began suddenly after the Death of our Saviour, as appears by the Visits, St *Paul* made to the Disciples of *Tyre* and *Sidon*. Shall we question now, whether these were true Penitents and Disciples or not? If not, why should we think that Christ's own Preaching and Miracles might not have wrought the same Blessed effects upon them, which his *Apostles* did? Or what Reason have we to doubt the Truth of their Repentance at any time, when the Gospel had been tender'd with the same advantage to them? Especially, since Christ himself tells us, that they would have Repented long ago in *Sackcloth* and *Ashes*: Than which it is not easy to find a more Proper Expression, to signifie at once a very Solemn and Serious Repentance.

Acts 21. 3, 4, 5. 27. 3

From

From the words thus explained, we may observe,

1st. *Obser.* That God is pleased to afford better means of Grace and Salvation to some Persons and Nations, than to others.

2d. *Obser.* That the same Means, which are unprofitable to some Men, would surely have been effectual to the Reformation of others, if they had enjoyed them.

3d. *Obser.* That the Final Condition of those that Reject the Gospel, and continue Impenitent under the ministration of it, will be more grievous and intolerable than theirs, that were never called to Repentance by it.

I begin with the first of these, *viz.*

1. That God is pleased to afford better Means of Grace and Salvation to some Persons and Nations than to others.

In speaking to this Truth, I shall

1. Clear it by some Undeniable Instances: And,

2. Endeavour to vindicate the Equity of Divine Providence in reference to this Particular Diſpenſation of it.

1. For the Firſt, That God affords better Means of Grace and Salvation to ſome Perſons and Nations than to others, is clear to all that underſtand any thing of the ſtate of Religion in the World. When God began to diſtinguiſh his own People from the reſt of Mankind, he gave them better Means to improve and ſecure his Favour than the reſt enjoyed. He did not leave them meerly to the guidance of Natural Light, as he left the greateſt part of Mankind, but revealed himſelf to them by the miniſtry of Angels and Prophets, by Viſions and Voices from Heaven. He wrote down the Great Rules of their Obedience to him with his own Hand, and encouraged them to the practice of them by ſpecial and ample Promiſes. When God choſe the Poſterity of *Abraham* at firſt for his Peculiar People, he made an Expreſs Covenant with him to diſtinguiſh his Seed by Spiritual Bleſſings from all the Kindreds of the Earth. While

While all the World about him lived in Ignorance and Idolatry, worſhipping the Gods which their own Fears and Phancies had made, *Abraham* had the Priviledge to Converſe with God, and to behold *the day of* Chriſt *afar off*. He was taught the way of the Lord, and taught his Children to walk in the ſame Paths, to *do Juſtice and Judgment*, that God *might bring upon* Abraham *the great things* which he had ſpoken of him. And accordingly he did ſo: He gave him a numerous Offſpring, trained up in the Knowledge and Fear of the Only True God, inſtructed in all the minute inſtances of Obedience to him, and preſerved by Wonderful Providences againſt all the Malice and Fury of all the Fierce and Mighty Nations that were round about them. The Jews, in compariſon of other Nations, were the very Darlings of Providence; they lived in a Land of Light, when Darkneſs covered the Face of the whole Earth: A Land whoſe leaſt happineſs was, that it flowed with all kinds of Temporal Bleſſings, there being no Nation (as *Moſes* told them, when

Gen. 18. 19.

Deut. 4. 7, 8.

they were going to inhabit) that had God so nigh unto them in all that they called upon him for; or that had Statutes and Judgments so Righteous as all the Laws which he set before them for a Lamp to their Feet, and a Light unto their Paths; and which, if they carefully followed them, would assuredly bring them to the Cœlestial *Canaan*. To them (saith St. *Paul*, speaking of God's Distinguishing Grace and Goodness to the Jews) *were committed the Oracles of God*; to them *pertained the Adoption, and the Glory* (or Divine Presence) *and the Covenants, and the giving of the Law, and the service of God, and the Promises*.

Rom. 3.2.
Rom. 9.4.

And as the Jews, of all Nations in the World, stood the fairest for Eternal Life. So those of them that lived in our Saviours time, had Fairer Opportunities of being Happy, than all that lived before them in expectation of his Coming. And of all the Jews of that Age, the Inhabitants of the Great Cities of *Galilee*, such as *Corazin*, *Bethsaida* and *Capernaum*, living in the same Country and Neighbourhood that our Saviour did, had the greatest advantages

tages for the knowledge of the True God, and the way to Eternal Bliss and Happiness. They did not only hear the Fame of his Miracles, and the Echo of his Doctrine from distant Places, but they Saw and Heard them in the most Affecting and Immediate Manner; they beheld the Son of God cloathed with their own Nature, they heard him Preaching in their Streets, many of them that never saw or heard any thing in their lives before him. They heard his Divine Sayings, even the Words of Eternal Life from him; they Feasted on his Miracles, were Fed, Healed and Inlightned by them, and felt the Power of his Divinity in their Rescue from the Tyranny of Evil Spirits. Thus Salvation came home to the Jews, threw it self as it were into their Arms, and without waiting for their Entreaties, urged and obtruded it self upon them. And blessed are the Eyes which see the things which they saw, and the Ears which hear the words that they heard. It being as easie for such persons to enter into Life, as it is to believe their own Eyes and Ears, and to follow the *Mat.* 13. 16, 17.

Inſtructions they received from them? So that the Jews of our Saviours time, and eſpecially thoſe of his own Province and Acquaintance, had the Beſt Means of Salvation of any People upon Earth: And this was plainly the meaning of that Saying of his to the Woman of *Samaria* [John 4.22.] that *Salvation is of the Jews.*

'Tis true, after the Aſcenſion of our Lord, and the Preaching of the Goſpel to the Gentile World, all thoſe Nations to which the Goſpel came, ſtood upon the ſame Level with the Jews; I mean, had as Great Reaſon to believe the Goſpel, and embrace the tenders of it, as the Jews themſelves had, thoſe only excepted that ſaw our Saviour when he was riſen from the Dead. But ſome Nations have never yet received the Goſpel; and Myriads there are of People in the World, that never ſo much as heard of the Name of Jeſus, or the Holy Bible. Others, that once embraced the Goſpel, and made a Conſiderable Figure in the Chriſtian Church, have by departing from the Faith, and corrupting themſelves with Lewd Errours

rours and Practices, loſt all the Glorious Priviledges that were conferred upon them. Of this number were the ſeven Famous Churches of *Aſia*, mentioned in the *Revelations*, from whom Chriſt has recalled his Angels, and fetcht away his Golden Candleſticks, and left them in a Dark Night of Ignorance and Superſtition. And this ſhews that the Beſt Means of Grace and Salvation are not entailed upon particular Nations: And that the Synagogue of Satan may ſtand upon the Ruines of thoſe which were once the moſt Orthodox and Flouriſhing Churches.

In ſhort, if we take a view of the ſtate of Religion in the Chriſtian World at this day, nothing is more evident than the Vaſt Difference there is in the Adminiſtration of the Word and Sacraments (which are the Principal Means of Grace) in ſeveral Churches of the Greateſt Name, and the Higheſt Pretence to Purity of Faith and Worſhip: And that there is One above all the Reſt, where the Scriptures, the Great Inſtrument of our Salvation, are wreſted out of the Hands of the Peo-

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ple, leſt they ſhould diſcern the wrong that is done them in denying them the *Key of Knowledge*, and with their own Eyes ſee the things which belong to their Eternal Peace.

Now by all theſe Inſtances it is evident, that there is a great Inequality in the Diſpoſal of the Means of Grace, and that God does not afford them to all Men, or in all Ages, alike: But to ſome he gives more, and to others leſs, according to his Sovereign Will and Pleaſure. And this our Saviour hath very plainly repreſented to us in the Parable of the Talents, which the Lord that was Travelling into a far Country diſtributed to his Servants: To one he gave five, to another two, and to a third but a ſingle Talent, with this General Charge, that what they had received they ſhould employ to his advantage, till his occaſions ſhould permit his return to them.

Mat. 25. 14, 15. *&c.*

2. I ſhall now endeavour to vindicate the Providence of God in reference to this Particular Diſpenſation of it, by ſhewing that there is no Injuſtice in the Unequal Diſtribution of the Means of Grace and Happineſs. To

clear

clear this, we muſt conſider what a Reaſonable Creature, that is framed to deſire its own Happineſs, may expect from a Juſt and Faithful Creator. And ſurely he may expect, that the Author of his Being, and of his Deſire of being Happy, ſhould once at leaſt put it into his Power to be ſo: And that he ſhould not call him to an Account for not Improving any Advantages for it, which he never enjoyed. Theſe two things, I ſay, he may promiſe himſelf, becauſe a Being Infinitely Good and Juſt, as God is, could not make him, only to make him Miſerable, as he muſt have done, ſhould he either deny him all Power to be Happy, or puniſh him Eternally for not improving the Power which he never gave him.

But then there is no Reaſon from the Nature of Juſtice to expect, that God ſhould do more for Man than this; becauſe this is enough to make him Happy, if he be not wanting to himſelf; and if he be, it is Juſt he ſhould be Miſerable, ſince he might and would not be Happy. For God, who has made us Free and Reaſon-

able

able Creatures, is not bound to force us into Happineſs againſt our choice, no more than he was bound to Create us at firſt in a ſtate of Perfect and Unchangeable Happineſs. Nor does his Juſtice require of him, that he ſhould be Equally Gracious to all Men, and put them into the ſame advantagious Circumſtances for the attainment of Eternal Life. His giving better Means to one Perſon than to another, is no wrong to him that has enough to bring him to the ſame Bleſſed State. All that becomes a Faithful Creator is, that having given us Being capable of Eternal Happineſs and Miſery, he ſhould not deny us that Meaſure of Grace, without which, tho we ſhould do our utmoſt to pleaſe him, we muſt be Miſerable. And therefore all that is requiſite to juſtifie the Providence of God in this matter, is to prove that he gives every man ſufficient Power to be Happy, and will take an account of him for no more than he really gives him. For the firſt of theſe,

1. That God affords every man ſufficient Power to be happy. I muſt deſire you to weigh the Argument already

ready ſuggeſted for it. It is certain, that God has planted an Eternal Deſire of Happineſs in the Heart of Man, and that this Deſire is the great Principle of Virtue and Obedience to the Will of God; and this, I think, is a good Argument to prove, that God does not fruſtrate this Deſire by his meer Will and Pleaſure, I mean, by denying any man that Grace and Aſſiſtance which is abſolutely neceſſary to his attainment of it; becauſe the conſequence of this would be an infinite and undeſerved Unhappineſs to him, which is never to be reconciled to the Rules of Juſtice and Equity. But beſides this, God allows every man to expect that which is evidently juſt and fair from him, and ſo far makes him Judge in his own caſe, knowing himſelf to be infinitely clear in his Dealings with him. His appealing to the Common Notions of men concerning this equity of his Actions towards them, and giving them warning to expect an Univerſal Judgment, are very plain Demonſtrations of this Truth. *Come now, let us Reaſon together, ſaith the Lord; What Iniquity have your Fa-* Iſa. 1. 18. Jer. 2. 4.

thers

Ezek. 18. 25. *thers found in me? Is not my way Equal, O House of Israel?* Whence I argue thus: We ought not to fasten any thing upon God which evidently contradicts the Natural Notions of Justice and Equity; and therefore ought not to charge him with creating men under a necessity of being Eternally Miserable for want of sufficient Power to be Happy, because this is a direct contradiction to the Natural and Brightest Notions of Justice and Righteousness. What is this, but to thrust men into the World, only to gain an opportunity to inflict Eternal Torments upon them in the next? And if this be fair and just Dealing, I desire to know what is that we may have leave to call Cruel and Unjust. The greatest Evil we can possibly have any Idea of, is that of Eternal Damnation: And the Highest Injustice is to inflict the Greatest Evil upon meer Pleasure, or, which resolves into it, for not doing something that was ever Impossible to be done: And then to charge God with Damning Men at Pleasure, or for what they never had Power to help, is to charge the Father of Mercies with Transf-

Transcendent Cruelty, and the Judge of the whole World with the Highest Injustice. And I cannot imagine why men that are lovers of Truth, and have a tender sence of Gods Honour, should not be willing to let fall such a Charge as this, rather than own God to be so Good and Just, as to allow every man sufficient Grace to do Well and be Happy; which is a Thought that sits easie upon the Mind, being every way square and sutable to its Natural Notions of the Divine Perfections: Whereas the contrary, after all endeavours to reconcile it to the Honour of God, is a *Bold* and *Staring* Contradiction to it.

After this, what need I say, That 'tis natural to suppose that God hath a Paternal Affection to all his Off-spring: That he has given every man a Law, in his own Breast, to guide him to Virtue and Happiness: That he shews to every man what is Good, and does not expect Impossibilities from any: That he gives Common Grace to All, and 'tis certain he gives nothing in vain: Whereas all his Grace and Favour to Heathens and Wicked Christians would

would be utterly in vain, if it were not an earneſt of Special and Saving Grace, ſuppoſing them to make the beſt Improvements of it, which are poſſible for them.

2. God will take an account of men only for ſuch Means of Grace as he really gives them. In the day of Judgment no man ſhall anſwer for two Talents, that received but one. The Heathens that have but the ſingle Light of Nature to guide them towards God and Heaven, ſhall not periſh for not believing in Chriſt, when they never heard of him. So the Apoſtle tells us, Rom. 2. 11, 12. *There is no Reſpect of Perſons with God: For as many as have ſinned without the Law, ſhall periſh without the Law; and as many as have ſinned in the Law, ſhall be judged by the Law, i. e.* God will judge the World by a Juſt and Equitable Rule, according to the Means that men have enjoyed, and the Opportunities they have had of knowing and obeying his Will, and not by any Perſonal Reſpects, which too often warp and pervert the Judgments of Men. And then the poor Heathen, that never had

had any written Divine Law to direct his Actions, but was led by Nature to *do the things contained in the Law*, ſhall be tried by the Laws which Nature taught him: The Jew by the Law of *Moſes*, and the Inſtructions of the Prophets: And the Chriſtian, that has far better Means of Salvation than both theſe, ſhall be judged by the Goſpel, or Law of Chriſt. And from hence it follows, that God will reckon with man at the laſt day only for their own meaſure of Grace, be it more or leſs; every man ſhall be accountable to him for ſo much as he receives from him, and no more will he require at his Hands; and ſo doing, it is evident, that he cannot be injurious to any. For God is not obliged to give equal meaſures of Grace to all men, and to exceed what is neceſſary to bring them to Happineſs. He did not owe the World a Redeemer, or ſo much as a ſingle Prophet or Meſſenger from Heaven. The whole Covenant of our Redemption was an Act of Pure Sovereign Grace, and not the acknowledgment of a Debt, the non-payment of which had been the breach

Rom. 2. 14, 15, 16.

of

of any Rule of Justice and Righteousness. In giving men the necessary Means of obtaining his Favour in this and the Life to come, God discharges the part of a Just and Faithful Creator, as he will do that of a Righteous Judge, by calling every man to an account only for the Talents he was intrusted with; all that is more than this, is meer Grace and Bounty, to which we have no Plea of Right or Equity, and therefore have no wrong done us, if it pleases God to withhold it from us.

And this, I presume, is enough to clear the Justice of Providence, as to the various Dispensations of the Means of Grace and Happiness. To which I shall only add, that if we rightly consider things, the case of ignorant Heathens may not perhaps appear so very hard and deplorable above other mens, as we are apt to make it. For certainly the Disobedient Jews will have a greater Account to give than they, as having sinned against Greater Light: And a bad Christian will have a much heavier Charge against him than either of them. And tho it be true,

true, that *there is no other Name under Heaven whereby men can be ſaved, but only the Name of Chriſt*, yet it does not follow that the Heathens ſhall be never the better for Chriſt, becauſe they knew nothing of his Dying for Sinners: For this the Apoſtles themſelves ſeemed not to know till after his Reſurrection, and then it is not to be thought that all the pious Jews that lived before them ſhould know it, who yet (we doubt not) were all ſaved by the merit of his Death. However, it does not become us to judge the whole Heathen World, till God himſelf has done it; and the rather, becauſe we are aſſured that he has *Ordained* the ſame Perſon *to be Judge* both of Us and them, and that he will judge *according to the Goſpel, i. e.* ſutably to the Mild and Gracious Temper of it. And ſince the Heathens were included in the firſt Promiſe of a Saviour, made to all Mankind in *Adam*, [*Gen.* 3. 15.] who knows, but thoſe of them that worſhipped the One true God, according to the Light which he gave them, may be included alſo in the Common Salvation? *Rom.* 2. 16.

I proceed now to the Second Obſervation, which is this,

2*d. Obſer.* That the ſame Means of Grace which are unprofitable to ſome Perſons, would ſurely have been effectual to the Reformation of others; if they had enjoyed them. Of this we have a plain Inſtance in the Text; *Tyre* and *Sidon*, who have the character, both in Scripture, and Heathen Authors, of a very Diſſolute People, if they had enjoyed the Preaching, and been ſo happy as to have ſeen the Mighty Works of our Saviour, would aſſuredly have yielded to the Natural Impreſſions of them, and embraced the Goſpel-condition of Repentance, which the Jews rejected and ſpurned at. And the ſame Obſervation God himſelf makes concerning the Temper of his own People, and other Nations in former Ages, *Ezek.* 3. 4, 5, 6. where we find, when God gave a Charge to *Ezekiel*, and ſent him to Propheſie againſt the Houſe of *Iſrael*; he tells them before hand, that the ſame Admonition would certainly have prevailed with ſome other People, but he muſt not

not expect the like ſucceſs amongſt thoſe he was going to; for they were hardned in their Impieties, and reſolved to have their way, tho they could ſee nothing but Deſtruction before them; *Thou art not* (ſaith God) *ſent unto a People of a ſtrange Speech, and an hard Language, but to the Houſe of* Iſrrel: *Not to many People —— whoſe words thou canſt not underſtand: Surely had I ſent thee to them, they would have hearkned unto thee, for they will not hearken unto me: For all the Houſe of* Iſrael *are Impudent and Hard-hearted.* Now what is plainer in theſe Inſtances, than that God did foreſee that other Nations would have taken the Warnings, and embraced the Meſſages which he ſent the Jews in divers Manners and Ages by the Prophets, and at laſt by his Son Jeſus Chriſt: And which for the moſt part, they as ſcornfully rejected, as they were kindly offered and propounded to them? And accordingly we find, when the Apoſtles, after our Saviours Aſcenſion, preacht the Goſpel to the Gentiles, that it Ran and was Glorified amongſt them, while the Jews did their utmoſt to oppoſe it,

and put all the Diſgrace and Ignominy they could deviſe upon it.

And the Truth is, this is the very thing that haſtned the Goſpel into the Gentile World. The barrenneſs of the Soil it was planted in, through the wilfull hardneſs and infidelity of the Jews, and the plentiful Harveſt there was like to be in other Countries, occaſioned *the Lord of the Harveſt to ſend the Labourers* abroad, in expectation of better Returns for all his Expence and Kindneſs. 'Twas not fit they ſhould ſit ſtill, when they might be better employed, and had the Converſion of the whole World upon their Hands. *Act.* 13.45, 46. And therefore when *Paul* and *Barnabas* preacht at *Antioch*, and the Jews contradicted and blaſphemed their Doctrine, while the Gentiles flockt in great multitudes to hear it, the Apoſtles (applying themſelves to the Jews) told them, *it was neceſſary that the Word of God ſhould have been firſt ſpoken to you: But ſeeing ye put it from you, and judge your ſelves unworthy of Everlaſting Life, loe we turn to the Gentiles.* And a happy turn it was, for by this Means the Goſpel had a free and ſpeedy paſſage

paſſage into the World, and wherever it came, turned men *from Darkneſs unto Light, and from the Power of Satan unto the Living God.* And upon this account St. *Paul* tells us, *that the Fall of the Jews was the Riches of the World, and the Diminiſhing of them the Riches of the Gentiles,* Rom. 11. 12. *i.e.* The Poor Ignorant Heathens, that were hitherto deſtitute of the Beſt Means of Saving Knowledge, were mighty Gainers by the infidelity of the Jews, as ſucceeding immediately to the ſame Rich and Glorious Priviledges, the ſame Powerful Means of Grace and Salvation, which the Jews had forfeited. But that which I chiefly aim at, is this:

The Converſion of the Gentiles by the Preaching of the Goſpel, which the Jews rejected, undeniably proves that the ſame Means of Grace are both Profitable and Ineffectual to ſeveral Perſons and Nations, according as they are diſpoſed to uſe them. But why do I inſiſt on ſo plain a Truth, when every Society of Chriſtians in the World is an ample and viſible Demonſtration of it?

Now if the ſame Means of Grace may have ſuch Different Succeſs, as to be rejected by ſome, whilſt others are reformed and converted by them, from hence we may gain theſe two Inſtructions:

1. That the Grace of God is not wrought in men by Means which they cannot reſiſt. Nothing is plainer, than that our Saviour upbraided the Jews for reſiſting the ſame Kind and Meaſure of Grace, which would have wrought Repentance in *Tyre* and *Sidon*: And this we may ſafely ſay, was not Irreſiſtible Grace, for then it could not be the ſame which the Jews reſiſted. Beſides, Chriſts upbraiding the Jews for not Repenting, implies, that it was their own Fault they did not; which yet could not be, unleſs God had firſt put it into their power to Repent: but this, it is plain, he did not, if nothing leſs than Irreſiſtible Grace could have brought them to Repentance.

Now this Conſideration, that the Means of Grace are Reſiſtible, ſhould make us extreamly cautious of driving off our Repentance and Amendment of Life, in expectation of ſome mighty

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irreſiſtible Act of God, to ſave us the labour of turning our ſelves to him. There is no doubt but God can overrule the moſt ſtubborn and inflexible Wills of Men, and bear them down, in ſpight of all their Reluctancies, into the Faith and Obedience of the Goſpel; And had he promiſed them ſo to do, they might ſafely have depended upon him. But ſince he has made no ſuch Promiſe, and does every day permit Incorrigible Sinners to reſiſt his Holy Spirit, and withſtand the Goſpel, till they have ſinned beyond the poſſibility of Repentance. How ſhould this awaken thoſe that have any purpoſes of Repenting at all, to put themſelves beyond the danger of miſcarrying for ever, by a ready and immediate execution of them? The laſt care that God will ever take of the Salvation of Men, is long ſince diſcovered to them in the Goſpel: And by an experience of many hundred years it is evident in all Churches, that the Goſpel does not carry an Irreſiſtible Force along with it. It gives men all the Reaſon, and Aſſures them of all the Help and Aſſiſtance that can be reaſonably deſired, to perſuade

ſuade them into a compliance with it, and there it leaves them; *i. e.* it leaves them to their choice, to accept or refuſe its Propoſals, and ſo to be Happy or Miſerable as they pleaſe. So that if men will not take any pains with themſelves to underſtand their Everlaſting Intereſt, and to ſtoop their minds to the Obedience of the Goſpel, but wait to ſee what God will do with them, they will find that he will not drive them into Heaven againſt their Wills.

2. Hence it follows, that the Impenitency of men under the Goſpel, is to be aſcribed to their own wilful and incorrigible Temper, and not to any weakneſs or inſufficiency in the Goſpel to reform and ſanctifie them. The Goſpel has ſufficiently verified what it ſpeaks of it ſelf, that it is *the Power of God to Salvation*. The Converſions it has wrought in the World from all kinds of Superſtition, Wickedneſs and Impiety, abundantly teſtifie the Divine Virtue and Efficacy of it: And (what is all along ſuppoſed in this Diſcourſe) the Good Spirit of God is always ready to bleſs the Means of his own

own Appointment, and to make them effectual to his own Gracious Ends and Purpoſes, without reſpect of Perſons, where men do not diſtinguiſh themſelves by their wilful neglect or perverſe and peremptory Oppoſition to them. This being the caſe, there can be no other reaſon why the Goſpel at any time fails of its Bleſſed Effect, but the ſtupid and inflexible Temper of thoſe that live unprofitably under the mighty influences of it. And hence St. *Paul* imputes the Impenitency of ſuch men to their *Deſpiſing the Goodneſs and Forbearance of God, and not knowing that the Goodneſs of God leadeth to Repentance:* Which ſurely he would not have done, had he known the While, that God was not ſo Good unto them, as to furniſh them with ſufficient Grace to Repent withal. *Rom.* 2. 4.

Conſidering then what Different Effects the miniſtration of the Goſpel has upon the Hearts and Lives of Men, and the reaſon why ſome are hardned, while others are inlightned and renewed in the Spirit of their Minds, we ſee there lies a great deal upon our endeavours to diſpoſe and qualifie our Hearts,

Hearts, leſt the Word ſhould not profit us, *which is able to ſave our Souls.* The Beſt Means of Grace, the moſt Powerful Preaching in the World, ſeconded by the mighty Operations of the Spirit, will not ſoften our Hearts, will not melt them into Repentance, while we ſuffer them to be *hardned by the Deceitfulneſs of Sin.* And therefore neither our Saviour, nor his Apoſtles ever pretended to convert all that heard them, or that ſaw them doing Miracles by the Finger of God. There is a certain good Temper and ingenuity of Mind, diſpoſing us to be juſt to our ſelves, and to the Truths we hear, which is requiſite to our Edification by them. *Judas* heard as Good Preaching, and certainly got as little Good by it as ever any man did. His eager deſire of Wealth and Worldly Gains (which ſeem to have been his Aim in keeping cloſe to our Saviour, hoping according to the Common Opinion, that he would have proved a Great Temporal Monarch) had ſo perverted his Mind, that the Beſt Inſtructions, and the moſt Abſolute Example of Virtue and Piety that ever the

the World had, could not prevail with him to be Virtuous and Good. We ſhould therefore be very cautious, leſt the ſame Word which is *a Savour of Life* to others, ſhould prove a Sentence of Death and Condemnation to our Selves. But I haſten to the third and laſt Obſervation, *viz.*

3d. *Obſer.* That the final condition of thoſe that reject the Goſpel, and continue impenitent under the miniſtration of it, will be more grievous and intolerable than theirs, that were never called to Repentance by it. So our Saviour told the Cities of *Corazin* and *Bethſaida*; *It ſhall be more tolerable for* Tyre *and* Sidon *in the Day of Judgthan for you, i. e.* they that have only reſiſted the Light of Nature, ſhall then receive a milder Sentence than you, that have Guides and Inſtructors from Heaven, that have had the Son of God among you, that have rejected his Doctrine, diſregarded his Miracles, and refuſed the Greateſt Salvation that was ever offered to men.

Now, that this *Wo* belongs to all that obey not the Goſpel preached to them,

them, tho they never heard a ſyllable from Chriſt himſelf, or ſaw the leaſt of thoſe *Mighty Works*, with which he *upbraids* the Galileans in the Text, will appear if we conſider that God has provided as well for the Faith of the Church in this and all future Ages, as he did for that of the Jews, that lived in the days of our Saviour. And if there be as much reaſon now to believe the Goſpel, as there was in our Saviour's time, 'tis certain there is as much reaſon to fear the Threatnings denounced in it againſt Impenitent Sinners. I know we are apt to fanſie that the Hearers of Chriſt's Doctrine, and the Spectators of his Miracles, ſtood in much better light to diſcern the Divinity of them, than we do at this day. But wherein does the great difference lie? They ſaw Chriſt in the Fleſh; but they *ſaw no Beauty in him* Iſa. 53. 2, 3. *that* they *ſhould Deſire him*; yea, they ſaw him in ſo humble a Guiſe and Habit, as raiſed their Contempt more than their Admiration of him. They had but the ſame Propheſies concerning his coming, and the Quality of his Perſon, which the Chriſtian Church from

from the firſt Foundation of it has been all along in poſſeſſion of. They heard *the Gracious Words that proceeded* from him: But certainly neither *Chorazin* nor *Bethſaida*, nor *Jeruſalem* it ſelf, heard ſo much of the Doctrine of Chriſt, till after his Reſurrection, as the four Goſpels have acquainted us with. The Jews indeed had the advantage of being Eye-witneſſes of his Miracles, which it is impoſſible we ſhould have: But beſides, that we have Invincible Evidence of the Reality of them, from the Teſtimony of Perſons too Good and too Knowing to deceive us, inſerted into the moſt Ancient and Sacred Records of our Religion, received by the Univerſal Church in all Ages, and confirmed by the declared Enemies of our Saviour and his Do-Doctrine: I ſay, beſides all this, the Goſpel has ſince received as great and extraordinary Confirmations, as it did by all the Miracles that were ſeen in *Galilee*; I mean, by the Reſurrection of our Lord himſelf from the Dead, and by the wonderful effects which the Preaching of the Goſpel has wrought in the World: By its Triumphing

umphing over all the Wiſdom and Learning of the Greeks, and all the Power and Policy of the Roman Empire: By its Thriving under the hotteſt Perſecutions, and Planting it ſelf in the very Hearts of thoſe, that commanded the Force that was employed againſt it: In ſhort, by the Gradual Fulfilling of the Propheſies contained in the Goſpel concerning the Deſtruction of *Jeruſalem*, and the Reprobation of the Jewiſh Nation, the Coming of Antichriſt, and the ſtrange Figure and Havock which he ſhould make in the World. Theſe things are come to paſs ſince the Death of our Saviour, and we and our Fathers have ſeen them: And in theſe reſpects we have apparently as much advantage of the Cities in the Text, as they had of us in point of Miracles.

Now ſince we have as great evidence of the Truth of the Goſpel, as the Impenitent Jews had, if we reſiſt it as they did, and perſiſt in Unbelief and Diſobedience to it, what can we expect, but that the *Wo* denounced againſt them, ſhould fall with its full Weight and Terror upon us?

1. For

1. For first, It is evident by the Light of Nature, and it is the Ground of all the Threatnings in the Gospel, that Punishment is due to Sin, and that the more and the greater Sins any man is guilty of, the more Punishment he deserves. And who shall tell us what Punishment we deserve for our Sins, but he that is our Natural Law-giver, and our Rightful Judge.

2. God has expressly declared, that he will *render to every man according to his Deeds*, Rom. 2. 6. And then he will certainly punish a wicked Christian, not only for such sins as he is guilty of in common with wicked Jews and Heathens that never received the Gospel, but also for the abuse of Gospel-Grace, the violation of his Sacred Vows and Promises, and the neglect of all Opportunities and Advantages he has had of Improving himself in all Christian Virtues and Graces. 'Tis true, that this Declaration of God, that he will Judge us according to our Works, being part of the Gospel, must be understood in a Gospel sense, i. e. so as to leave room for Repentance: But then we are to consider, that this very Act

of

of Grace, if we do not Repent, will only inflame our Account, and make our Condemnation the more Juſt and Terrible.

3. To Reject the Goſpel, or continue Impenitent under the Diſpenſation of it, is to fruſtrate the Beſt Means of Salvation, the moſt extraordinary Kindneſs that ever was ſhewn to men; and therefore deſerves the ſevereſt Puniſhment, and the ſoreſt Damnation. We can never hope for Better Means of getting to Heaven, than what the Goſpel has furniſht us with, unleſs God had a Dearer Son, and a more Prevailing Mediator, than the Beloved and Holy Jeſus, to beſtow upon us. Our Refuſal therefore of ſuch a Favour, in the true conſtruction of it, *judging our ſelves unworthy of Eternal Life:* And we cannot think that God ſhould judge otherwiſe of us. But more than this, we apparently expoſe our ſelves to the utmoſt ſeverity he has threatned to uſe with the moſt inſolent and incorrigible Offenders. *That Servant* (ſaith our Saviour) *that knew his Lords Will, and prepared not himſelf, neither did according to his Will, ſhall be beaten with many*

Act. 13. 46.

Luk. 12. 47.

many Stripes. And thus Hypocrites and Unbelievers are markt out for the moſt diſmal and intolerable Deſtruction. And nothing can be Juſter, when God hath made the greateſt condeſcenſions to men, that are conſiſtent with his Juſtice, Wiſdom and Holineſs, than that they, who would not ſtoop to his Mercy, ſhould fall under his High Diſpleaſure, and feel the Heavieſt Strokes of his Mighty Indignation. *If the Word ſpoken by Angels was ſteadfaſt, and every Tranſgreſſion received a juſt Reward, how ſhall we eſcape, if we neglect ſo Great Salvation* as was tendred *by our Lord, and confirmed unto us by them that heard him?* Heb. 2. 2, 3.

Now the uſe we ſhould make of this Admonition, is to conſider the Danger we are in, as to the Publick and our own Concerns; and to haſten our eſcape out of it.

(1.) Let us then reflect upon the Danger we are in by our Great Impenitency, and abuſe of thoſe Excellent Means of Grace we have long enjoyed, through God's tranſcendent Goodneſs and Patience towards us. Was ever People more highly favoured by

Divine Providence? Was ever any Church Adorned with more burning and ſhining Lights in one Age, than the Preſent Church of *England* is? We cannot plead that we have wanted the Means of Inſtruction, or any thing elſe that is neceſſary to Salvation; 'Tis plain, we have wanted nothing ſo much as the Hearing Ear, and the good and honeſt Heart: And for want of theſe, many have ſnuft at the Word of Life, and kickt at the Ordinances of God: While others have for many years ſat contentedly under them. 'This, if we add to it the badneſs of our Principles, and the debauchery of our Lives, is a very ſad and melancholy Conſideration; eſpecially in the caſe we are in, who ſeem to have clean forgot, that the Goſpel came into this Iſland to call us to Repentance.

'Tis certain, that the Judgment of Kingdoms and States is and muſt be in this World, becauſe there will be no ſuch Societies in the next; and we cannot tell how near the Day of our Particular Judgment may be; but ſurely it haſtens as faſt as we do to make up the Meaſure of our Sins, and to declare

that

that we are not to be cured by any Methods of Grace, or any Revelations of the Wrath of God from Heaven. 'Tis no new thing for God to bereave a Sinful Nation at once of the greatest Comforts of this Life, and of the Means of Grace for a Better. And since the Gospel has already taken leave of some Churches, that flourisht in their time as much as we do at this day, how should this awaken us to a General Repentance, and to make our Reformation as solemn and conspicuous to the World, as our days of Fasting and Humiliation have been? I grant, we are still a People, in some respects, Considerable in the World: We Plough the Ocean as well, and reap as much advantage, perhaps, as any of our Neighbours by it. We send our Gallant Fleets and Armies abroad, and look Big upon the Nations that are round about us. And we are, or might be, a free People at home (if it were not for Tyrannical Lusts;) and in respect of our Spiritual Advantages, are like *Capernaum*, lifted up unto Heaven: But let us not value our selves too much upon these things, but consider that *Mat.* 11. 23.

our Fall is never the farther off, and will be but the more dreadful at laſt, if we go on to provoke Heaven by our ſins, and ungrateful Barrenneſs under the kindeſt Influences of it.

However, there is a certain Day of Judgment to come, when God will call every man in his own Perſon to an account for the Talents he has receiv'd, and the Improvement he ought to have made of them. And ſince our Eternal Condition depends upon the preſent Neglect or Improvement of the Means of Grace,

(2.) Let us be perſuaded to avoid the Danger, and prevent the Terror of the laſt Judgment, by bringing forth *Fruits meet for Repentance*, and anſwerable to our enjoyment and profeſſion of the Goſpel. To ſtrengthen this Exhortation, I will leave theſe two Conſiderations with you, and conclude.

1. That the Goſpel has waited much longer upon you than it did upon the Cities of *Galilee*, when Chriſt upbraided them for the refuſal of it. In the ſpace of three years, which our Saviour ſpent in Preaching the Goſpel, there could not be much time for his

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Preaching in any other Particular Place, conſidering what his manner of Life was, that he went about doing Good, and was almoſt continually moving from one City and Village to another. Now if Chriſt did ſo ſeverely Threaten theſe Cities after ſo ſhort a Trial, what will become of thoſe that ſpend their whole Lives in an obſtinate refuſal of Divine Grace, and after the loudeſt warnings and ſummons to Repent, ſtand out againſt all the force and power of the Goſpel, till they ſee Death and Eternity preſſing upon them?

2. Conſider, that our very Profeſſion of the Goſpel, if we obey it not, will but inflame our Guilt, and aggravate our Condemnation. We ſhall be found greater Sinners in the Day of Judgment, than thoſe Galileans that never entertained the Goſpel, if after all our Profeſſions of Faith in Chriſt, and the Sacred Vows and engagements with which we have ſolemnly bound our Souls to obey him; we ſhould either openly renounce him by a profane and vicious Converſation, or ſecretly withdraw our Hearts and Affections from him. This would argue ſuch

Baſeneſs and Treachery in us, ſuch vile Hypocriſie and Ingratitude, as can never be forgiven without a New Goſpel, and a New Sacrifice for Sin, which no man was ever ſo wretchedly vain to hope for. And what remains then, but a fearful expectation of the Day of Judgment, and being then found in a worſe Eſtate than Heathens and Infi-

1 Pet. 2. 21 dels? *For it had been better* for us *not to have known the way of Righteouſneſs, than after we have known it, to turn from the Holy Commandments delivered unto us.* Let us therefore be ſo wiſe for our ſelves, as to make uſe of the Laſt and Only Remedy which God has left us; and not burn the Day-light of Grace, which ſtill ſhines ſo Gloriouſly upon us. So Infinite a Mercy ought not to be plaid and trifled with. Our Danger grows every day with our Delays: And a *long refuſal* of the Grace of God, is *next to a final* and *abſolute rejection* of it, and that is the very *next ſtep* to Everlaſting Deſtruction. Briefly, we have all the Warnings that can be reaſonably expected from a Being of Adoreable Goodneſs and Holineſs, to *break off our Sins by Righteouſneſs*, that

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Iniquity may not be our Ruine. He hath ſolemnly declared, that he Delights not in the Death of them that Periſh, but chooſes that they ſhould Return and Live, Repent and be Happy. Let us therefore, now God is waiting to ſee what we will chooſe, and which way we will determine our Eternal Condition, haſten our return to him with all imaginable ſpeed; and not ſignalize our Folly by being the Authors of our own Deſtruction, by hardning our Hearts, and delaying our Repentance, till his abuſed Grace is for ever withdrawn, and there is no poſſibility left us of eſcaping the Damnation of Hell.

Sermon IV.

The Case of a Late, or Death-Bed Repentance.

Matth. 20. 9.

And when they came that were hired about the Eleventh Hour, they received every one a Penny.

THese Words are part of our Saviours Parable concerning an Housholder, to whom he likens the Kingdom of Heaven in this respect, that he went out at several Hours of the Day to hire Labourers into his Vineyard. With some he agreed early in the Morning for a Penny a Day,

a Day, and immediately sent them to their Work; others he hired at the Third, the Sixth, the Ninth Hour, and some not until the Eleventh, upon a General Promise of doing them all Right in their Wages. Now here was a great inequality in the Time which the several Labourers wrought in the Vineyard; the First beginning early in the Morning, bore all the Heat and Burden of the Day; the Last wrought but one Hour in the Cool of the Evening. And whereas it was expected that the Lord of the Vineyard would have considered this, and made every mans Wages proportionable to the time of his Service, he made no distinction at all between them; but the First, according to their Agreement, received every man a Penny: And when they came, that were hired about the Eleventh Hour, 'tis said, they also received every man a Penny.

Now I need not tell you, that there are those that would infer from hence, that the Sinner that Repents at the last hour of his Life, is as safe, and may be as secure of Heaven, as if he had been all his Life long employed in the Service

vice of God, and working out his Salvation with fear and trembling. And what Sinner upon Earth, that ever thinks of Repenting before he dies, can desire to hear a more delicious Doctrine than this? There is nothing can please a wicked man better, while he retains the sence of another World, than to have his liberty to enjoy his Sins as long as he can, and not fear being damned for them when he dies; and therefore any Doctrine that puts him into a way to do this, must be very welcome to him. And indeed of all that have been preft for this Service, there is none that promises fairer, than that which has been raised out of this Parable of our Saviour concerning the Labourers, and which assures every wicked man that he may Repent time enough to be saved, at his last hour. For, if he may do so, we can never convince him that he may not take his liberty the mean while, or that there is any necessity of Repenting in haste. He may be as wild and frolick as he pleases, gratifie every sensual Desire, and dance through all the Scenes of a Comical and Voluptuous Life,

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provided he take care, when he is glutted with the pleaſure of Sinning, to Repent once for all; and to do no more wickedly, when he has neither Time nor Temptation to do it. And were this the true and plain meaning of the Goſpel, I cannot imagine why one ill man ſhould be an Enemy to it: I rather think, that ſo ſoon as ever he came to underſtand it, he would be perfectly reconciled to the whole Doctrine of Chriſtianity for the ſake of this Kind Fare-well to the practice of it. And I dare appeal to any wicked Chriſtian, what ever he thinks of this Opinion, whether he does not heartily wiſh it were true, and would not gladly ſee it confirmed by plain Scripture and Reaſon. Now certainly this is no great Commendation of any Doctrine, but rather a juſt Prejudice againſt it: It being enough to make a good and wiſe man ſuſpect, that it is not ſound at bottom, becauſe it takes ſo univerſally with bad men.

But let us ſee what Foundation this Opinion has in Scripture, and particularly in this Parable of our Saviour (ſo often cited for it) concerning the Labourers

bourers that went into the Vineyard about the Eleventh Hour, and yet received as good Wages as they that went Early in the Morning, and had borne the Heat of the Day. And becauſe I deſire to ſpeak as home, and as plainly to this matter, as the Importance of it requires, I ſhall endeavour to ſhew theſe two things:

1. That this Parable has no relation to the Caſe of a Late or Death-bed Repentance.

2. That there is no other ground of aſſurance in the Goſpel, that the Repentance of a Dying Chriſtian, after a whole Life ſpent in Sin, and an obſtinate violation of his Baptiſmal Vow and Covenant, will ſecure him of Eternal Salvation.

But before I enter upon this Task, I deſire it may be conſidered, That the Controverſies concerning the ſence of Scripture muſt be endleſs and unprofitable, unleſs we agree upon proper and certain Rules to Guide us in the Explication of it: And ſurely we cannot eaſily think of better in expounding the Parables of the Goſpel, than firſt to be ſtrictly careful that we do not ſet the

Goſpel

Goſpel at variance with it ſelf, or make one Parable claſh and interfere with another: And then if there be any difficulty in explaining them, or it ſo happens that the words are fairly capable of two or more different Senſes, the ſureſt way to come to a ſatisfaction about the true meaning of them, is to obſerve the Occaſion our Saviour took to utter them; to follow the Thread of his Diſcourſe upon that Occaſion, and if need be to have recourſe to more plain and lightſome Scriptures, the ſenſe of which is agreed upon by the generality of the moſt Learned and Orthodox Chriſtians. And by theſe Rules I doubt not but to make it appear,

1. That this Parable of the Labourers has no Relation to the caſe of a Late or Death-bed Repentance. It was certainly another, and a very different thing, which was intended by it: I mean, the calling of the Jews and Gentiles into the Church at different Times, and in ſeveral Ages of the World; and not the Repentance of particular Perſons at this or that time of their Lives. If this can be made

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out, then I think it will sufficiently appear, that a Death-bed Repentance has no encouragement from the Text, as having no relation to it.

To make this matter as clear as I can, I shall lay down these following Propositions;

1st. *Prop.* That by the Lord of the Vineyards hiring Labourers into his Vineyard, is meant God's calling men into the Church, and entring into a Covenant with them to reward those that should be faithful in his Service. The Church, we know, is frequently compared to a Vineyard both in the Old and New Testament, and God is called sometimes the Lord, sometimes the Husbandman or Dresser of it. Thus, Isa. 5. 4. *What could I have done more to my Vineyard* (saith God) *that I have not done for it?* And that this Vineyard was the Church of *Israel*, is expresly said, vers. 7. *For the Vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the Church of* Israel, *and the men of* Judah *his pleasant Plant.* And in this style our Saviour expresses himself, John 15. 1. *I am the Vine, and my Father is the Husbandman*; and consequently

ſequently his Church is the Vineyard: For ſince he uſes the ſame compariſon which the Jewiſh Church had been accuſtomed to, his Diſcourſes upon it had been loſt upon the Hearers, if he had not uſed it in the ſame ſenſe which the Prophets did. And then, if the Vineyard in the Parable be the Church of God, his hiring Labourers into it, will very naturally ſignifie his calling men out of the Heathen World to his Peculiar Service, and Covenanting with them to Reward their Obedience to him. And by conſequence,

2d. *Prop.* The ſeveral hours of hiring Labourers into the Vineyards, do import the ſeveral General Calls by the which God is pleaſed to invite men into his Church and Service in different Ages, according to the various Diſpenſations of his Grace and Goodneſs. Thus he called the Jews, the Seed of *Abraham, his Friend*, betimes in the Morning, and agreed with them for their Service in the Covenant which he made with them at Mount *Sinai*. The mean while, and many Ages after this, the Gentiles ſtood idle, and then in the Ful-

Fulneſs of time, when the Day was far ſpent, he called them to work in his Vineyard upon the Gracious Terms and Conditions of the Goſpel. And beſides theſe, we may juſtly expect another Solemn and General Calling of the Jews, who left the Vineyard when the Gentiles entred into it, excluding themſelves through Unbelief: And this, by the beſt Light we have from the Goſpel, ſeems to be reſerved for the cloſe of the Day, or the Eleventh Hour in the Parable, *i. e.* to ſome or other of the laſt Ages of the World.

3d. *Prop.* The Time of God's Calling men into the Church, be it Early or Late, makes no difference in the reward they ſhall finally receive for their faithful and diligent Service to him. For ſo it is expreſly ſaid, that the Labourers that were hired about the Eleventh Hour, received equal Wages with thoſe that were long before them in the Vineyard, and had done a great deal of their Maſters Buſineſs, while they were wretchedly Idle, and Unſerviceable to him. And hence, how readily does this Truth offer it ſelf to the apprehen-

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ſion of every candid and judicious Inquirer into the meaning of this Parable? *viz.* that the Gentiles, who came late into the Church of God, in compariſon of the Jews; who were not called into the Vineyard till the Heat of the Day was over, and were Strangers to the Covenant of Life and Peace many Ages after it was ratified to the Seed of *Abraham*, ſhall yet enjoy the full benefit of it, and aſſuredly receive the ſame Reward of Eternal Life which was promiſed to the Faithful and obedient Iſraelites. And the ſame reaſon there is to believe, that whenever it ſhall pleaſe God to call in the Unbelieving Jews, or any of the Nations that never yet beheld the great light of the Goſpel, their late entrance into the Vineyard ſhall not bar them of an equal Reward with thoſe, that have finiſht their Work, and are long ſince gone to Heaven before them.

This I take to be the true Meaning and Importance of the Parable, and to have in many reſpects the advantage of that which ſtands in competition with it: Which will more fully appear, if we try them by the

Rules before mentioned, and consider,

1. The Rise and Occasion of this Parable, or the Dependance it hath upon the Words which our Saviour spake immediately before it: *Many that are First shall be Last, and the Last shall be First:* Whereupon it follows, *For the Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a man that went out early in the Morning to hire Labourers into his Vineyard,* &c. And 'tis very observable that our Saviour closes his Parable with the same saying which gave occasion to it; and then I am sure, that can be no Good Interpretation of it, which does not square with this saying: And certainly the truest (if any choice there be) is that which falls in most naturally with it.

Chap. 19. ult.

Chap. 20. 16.

Now to put the matter upon this Issue: By the Labourers we understand the Jewish and Christian Churches: And whereas our Saviour tells, that *the Last shall be First, and the First Last,* so the Gentiles that were hired last into the Vineyard, were the first in the Kingdom of Christ; and the Jews, who were first called will be the Last, being cast off for rejecting the Son, whom the Lord

Matt. 21. 38.

of

of the Vineyard ſent to receive the Fruits of it in their Seaſon, till the Fulneſs of the Gentiles be come in. And thus our Lord himſelf interprets this very paſſage, Mat. 8. 11, 12. *Many ſhall come from the* East *and* West, *and ſhall ſit down with* Abraham, Iſaac *and* Jacob *in the Kingdom of Heaven: But the Children of the Kingdom* (the Unbelieving Jews, that reject the Goſpel) *ſhall be caſt out into outer darkneſs.* Thus far there is a manifeſt congruity between the ſenſe which I have given of this Text, and that remarkable Sentence which our Saviour ſeems to have plac'd at both ends of the Parable, purpoſely to guide us through the meaning of it. Let us ſee now, how the Opinion of thoſe that expound it of Dying Penitents, will ſute with their being in the Firſt Rank of Chriſtians. Can they be ſaid to be firſt in the Kingdom of God (unleſs in the ſenſe that *Judas* was) who are Traytors to him till their laſt hour? Or do they do him better or longer Service than others, that defer their Repentance till they can do nothing but ask his Forgiveneſs for what they have al-

Rom. 11, 25.

ways done in contradiction to him? It is to be hoped that there are men, that for many years, from their Youth to their Dying Day, have lived in the fear of God, and a constant exercise of Virtue and Piety; and shall we say, that the best of these come behind those who live as long without God in the World, till they come to the very edge and point of Eternity? I confess I cannot imagine what construction these men can make of our Saviours Prophecy [*So the Last shall be First, and the First Last*] unless they will venture to say, that the Professors of Christianity, who begin not to look towards God and Religion till their last sickness, are before others in his Favour, and may therefore expect a greater reward than such as spend their whole lives in his Service: Which, were it true, I grant would be a mighty credit and encouragement to a Death-bed Repentance.

2. If we view the Context, and follow the Thread of our Saviours Discourse, we shall find that the Labourers that came first into the Vineyard, murmured at the Good-man of the House for making the last equal with them-

V 11, 12.

themſelves, who had borne the burden and heat of the day. Now this is exactly true of the Jews, who repined mightily at the Gentiles coming into the Church upon all advantages imaginable, being entiteled to the ſame Rewards, without obſerving the Rites, or feeling any of the Burdens which they themſelves had ſo many Ages laboured under. Nay, this raiſed their Envy ſo high, that St. *Paul* ſpeaks of it as the great impediment to their Converſion, the main thing that hindred their effectual cloſing with the Goſpel. But ſtill there was great reaſon for what was done, ſuppoſing the Jews to be the Early, and the Gentiles the Late Comers into the Vineyard. For tho the World was growing old when the Gentiles were called, yet are we generally called as young as the Jews themſelves were, and may work as long in the Vineyard, and perform as much and as faithful Service as they did: And therefore our coming after them can be no reaſon, why our Great Maſter ſhould not reward us as liberally to the full, as them. He that does a Days-work the laſt day of the year, if he

was called to it no sooner, deserves a Days-wages as well as he that was hired the first. But I hope no man will say, there is the same reason why a Death-bed sorrow, after ten thousand Calls to Repentance and Newness of Life, should be equally rewarded with the longest holy and most religious Life. However, that our Saviour was not of this mind, may appear.

3. If we consider the plain scope and meaning of other Parables; such as that of the five Foolish Virgins, who wanted Oyle in their Lamps at the Bridegrooms coming, and while they went to buy, were barred out of his Presence, which the Wise were admitted into; and when they cryed, *Lord, Lord, open to us*, (methinks I hear the Sorowful Death-bed Cry!) received this Dreadful Answer, *Verily I say unto you, I know you not.* And as little coherence will be found between a Dying Penitents being equally rewarded with the most Eminent Christians (as he must be, if we rank him with the Labourers in the Text) and the Parable concerning the Talents, the Moral of which is apparently this, that good men

Mat. 25. 10,11,12.

shall

shall be rewarded according to the good they have done, and the several advantages they were entrusted with; and they that have done none, but squandred away their Lives and Opportunities of Grace, shall feel the high displeasure of God, and with the Unprofitable Servant be cast into outer darkness. Let men impartially consider these easie and obvious things, and they will assuredly find but small reason to build their hopes of Eternal Life upon any struggle or remorse of Conscience at their Death, which few bad men (that have any tolerable sense of another World) are, and even *Judas* himself was not exempted from.

4th *Prop.* The fourth and last Proposition is, Were we sure that the hiring of Labourers at the eleventh hour, did signifie the late calling of Particular Christians to the Faith and Obedience of the Gospel, yet this will not reach the case of a Death-bed Repentance. There is a manifest disparity between them in several respects. For,

1. They that were called so late as the eleventh hour, were guilty of no de-

lays, but embraced the first opportunity they had of labouring in the Vineyard. The reason they gave why they stood so long Idle in the Market, *viz.* because *no man had hired them*, implies that they were ready to be imployed, and that they chearfully closed with the first invitation that was offered to them; and so doing they were not to be blamed that they were not earlier at work. For this is as much as *Abraham*, the Father of the Jewish Church, or the Apostles, the first Labourers in the Christian, did. They came as soon as their Lord called them, tho they were not in the Vineyard till the middle age of their Lives. And I doubt not, if a poor Indian, that never heard of Christ till he entred upon the last stage of his Life, shall then become a serious and faithful Christian, but that his reward will be great in Heaven. But this is not the case of those who were devoted to the Service of God in their Infancy, who have lived many years under the ministry of his Sacred Word, and the obligations of the Holy Sacraments: Who have resisted the motions of the Blessed Spirit, and the admoni-

V. 7.

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tions of Parents and Friends, never hearkning unto any till the Rough Meſſenger of Death comes, and tells them roundly in their Ears, that now they muſt die and away to Judgment. And 'tis no wonder they are then ſorry that they ſpent their time ſo ill, while Hell and Deſtruction look them in the Face, but they cannot but ſay they had fair and frequent Warnings to have uſed it better.

2. They who came ſo late into the Vineyard, had yet one hour of Trial; and this, in proportion to the Day which God allows us to work out our Salvation in, is the twelfth part of our Lives. 'Tis true, this is but a ſhort time, conſidering what engagements we are under of ſerving our Creator and Redeemer all the days of our Lives; but ſtill it is much longer, than a Sinner who defers his Repentance to his Death, allows himſelf to do the whole work of Religion, to break the habits of Vice, to exerciſe all the virtues of the Chriſtian Life, and to put himſelf into a poſture for Eternity. He vows perhaps, and declares upon the word of a Dying-man

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what great things he would do; but alas his Breath goes away with his Vows, and gives him not a minute to prove his Sincerity in.

3. The last Comers into the Vineyard wrought an hour, and therein performed the whole Duty they contracted for. But what is this to the purpose of men that work not at all? For surely to ask pardon for what they have not done, to be sorry for what they have, or to resolve to do better if they had opportunity, will not bring them within the notion of Labourers, and then it cannot intitle them to the reward. This is the state of Dying Penitents; their whole work lies upon their hands, and that's the ground of all their Sorrow, and resolution to work (if it were not too late) which therefore are not working; and to suppose that God will accept them as if they were, is to say that the Master of the Vineyard, who was all the day hiring Labourers into it, was very indifferent what they did there, and would surely have been as Bountiful (if there had been occasion) to those that did him no service, as to them that did

did the moſt, provided they were but ſorry they had not ſerv'd him at all, and were willing to work juſt when Night came, and forbid them.

And thus, I think, I have ſufficiently proved that this Parable has no Relation to the Caſe of a late, or Death-bed Repentance; which was the Firſt General propounded to be ſpoken to. The ſecond was,

2. That there is no other ground of Aſſurance in the Goſpel, that the Repentance of a Dying Chriſtian, after a whole Life ſpent in Sin, and an obſtinate Violation of his Baptiſmal Vow and Covenant, will ſecure him of Eternal Salvation. That the Goſpel gives no ſuch Encouragement to Men that Trifle with the Grace of God; we may be as ſure, as we can be, that the Goſpel does not contradict it ſelf; and that not in trivial Inſtances, but in the great and moſt eſſential parts of it, I mean, the deſign of its being revealed to men, and the conditions it requires of them in order to Eternal Life and Happineſs. For,

1. Did the Goſpel aſſure us, that God will accept of Dying Vows and ſorrows,

rows, instead of a Life of Virtue and Holiness, it would shew us a notable way to evade and overthrow its own great and admirable Design, the very end for which it appeared unto men; which was to teach and oblige us to lead holy and virtuous Lives, to deny *Ungodliness and Wordly Lusts, and to live Soberly, Righteously and Godlily in this present World*; while we are resident here, and capable of doing Service to God and Men. This is the end of all the Institutions of the Gospel, and particularly of our Baptism, by which we are amitted into Covenant with God: For therefore (saith St. *Paul*) *we are buried with Christ by Baptism into Death, that like as Christ was raised from the Dead by the Glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of Life*: *i. e.* From our first entrance into Christianity, till we have finisht our Course, and are got beyond the Dangers and Temptations of this sinful World. But where is this New Life, when we are just a Dying? Do we answer the end of our Baptism, tho we never set a step in our Christian Race, till our Life is run out? Or does the Gospel, what-

Tit. 2. 11, 12.

Rom. 6. 4.

whatever it obliges us to do, diſpence with us for not doing it? This perhaps in ſome mens Opinion would advance the Grace, but ſurely no man will ſay it commends the Wiſdom of the Goſpel: For who does not ſee, that the deſign of making us Holy is loſt, ſhould the Goſpel once declare that we may be diſpenſed with for not being Holy; or, that it is enough to ſecure us of Heaven, to be truly ſorry at the laſt that we have lived wickedly all our days. And were this the true ſenſe of the Goſpel, I cannot ſee what Anſwer can be returned to thoſe that ſhould Object againſt the Author of it, that either our Sactification was not the thing he really deſign'd; or if it was, that he has taken effectual care (conſidering our natural averſeneſs to it, and the fierce and rampant inclinations to Vice, of thoſe that ſtand in greateſt need of it) to diſappoint himſelf of his end; that he has left us all the gains and delights of Sin, and himſelf the honour only of Pardoning our ungodly and malitious Lives; that we may dabble and bemire our ſelves in all the Pollutions of the Fleſh and of the World, and

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wash off all with a few Penitential Tears when we die; that we may be extreamly wicked with good management to the last, and tho we never glorified God in our Lives, be sure to receive a Crown of Glory from him at our Death.

2. That the Gospel gives no such encouragement, is certain, because it expressly requires Holiness and Obedience to the Precepts of it, as a necessary condition of future Happiness. As it designs the Professors of it should be excellent men, holy in all manner of Conversation, so it excludes them out of Heaven who frustrate its design by wicked and unworthy Practices, and expose its Blessed Author to Open Shame. *Without Holiness*, saith the Apostle, (*i.e.* purity of Heart and Life) *no man shall see the Lord.* *If thou wilt enter into Life* (saith our Saviour) *keep the Commandments.* *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven: But he that doth the Will of my Father, which is in Heaven.* *For if ye live after the Flesh, ye shall die: But if ye through the Spirit do mortifie the deeds of the Body,*

Heb. 12. 14.
Mat. 19. 17.
7. 21.
Rom. 8. 13.

Body, ye ſhall live. To them who by patient continuance in well-doing, ſeek for Glory, and Honour, and Immortality, God will render *Eternal Life. But to them that are contentious, and obey not the Truth, but obey Unrighteouſneſs, Indignation and Wrath, Tribulation and Anguiſh, upon every Soul of man that doth evil.* Theſe and many other Texts, which we muſt own have nothing of the ſhade or dimneſs of a Parable in them, do undeniably prove the indiſpenſable neceſſity of a Holy Life to fit and qualifie us for Eternal Bliſs and Happineſs: And then to apply the Promiſes of Heaven to men that have lived a wicked, and are paſt living a godly Life, is plainly to expound the Goſpel into a direct contradiction to it ſelf. For, can a man that is dying, be ſaid to have lived holily, only becauſe he is ſadly troubled for a very ſinful Life? Or hath he kept the Commandments, that has lived in a conſtant violation of them, and of his own Covenant to keep them, and only promiſes over again to keep them, when it is too late? Can we call him a Mortified Man, that after he has Rom. 2. 7, 8, 9.

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gorg'd himself with the pleasures of Sin, and sinned away the power of Lust, resolves yet to be very chaste and temperate upon his Death-bed? Or can we say, that he seeks for Glory and Immortality by his Patience and Constancy in Well-doing, who at the end of his Natural is to begin the whole Christian Life, and has always been a perfect Stranger to the Conversation of Heaven?

'Tis true, those that have made it their business to please God, have lived soberly, and kept a Good Conscience towards Men, need not doubt the pardon of their Offences upon their Repentance for them, because their Repentance is ever accompanied with actual Holiness, and where Holiness is the Fruit of Repentance, the End will be *Everlasting Life.* But the case is vastly different in those, that have left themselves no time to reform their lives, and are forc'd to spend that little they have left in fruitless Vows and Wishes: Because these men have neglected the main condition of the Covenant, the great End of the Gospel, and of their Lives, I mean, the Glo-

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rification of God by the Purity and Holineſs of them: A thing in its own nature neceſſary to their Happineſs, without which no man can ſee the Lord.

But perhaps you will ſay, tho thoſe pangs of Sorrow and Devotion, which men that have lived wretched and profligate Lives diſcover on their Death-beds, cannot be called a Holy Life, yet they are good ſigns of Repentance and Faith in Chriſt; and are they not ſufficient to intitle them to Pardon and Eternal Life? To this I Anſwer,

8. 'Tis certain that no true Penitent and Believer in Chriſt ſhall finally periſh. But then the Queſtion is, whether the Goſpel will allow that to be true ſaving Faith or Repentance, which is deſtitute of the Fruits of Rigteouſneſs, after a fair ſeaſon and opportunity for them. And here it is but fair the Goſpel ſhould ſpeak for it ſelf; *Bring forth Fruits meet for Repentance, and think not to ſay within your ſelves, we have* Abraham *to our Father. Every Tree which bringeth not forth Good Fruit, is hewn down and caſt into the Fire. For the Son of Man ſhall come in* Mat. 3. 7, 8. Luk. 3. 9. Mat. 16. 27.

the Glory of his Father, and then he shall reward every Man according to his Works.

Jam. 2.14. *What doth it profit, my Brethren, tho a man say he hath Faith, and hath not Works?* If a fruitless Faith and Repentance cannot profit, I am sure they can-

Vers. 17. not save us. *If Faith without Works* (as St. *James* tells us) *is dead*, how sad is the condemnation of a dying Sinner, whose Faith is dead before him, and whose time of working is over, tho' he seek it with Tears? If sorrow for Sin may be without amendment of Life, and then will not pass for true Repentance, it can be no certain sign of it: And if Christ will render to every man according to his works, how sorrowful is the case of that man, who has worn out his whole Life in Sin, and hardly left himself the least remnant of time to amend it?

2. No man can plead any Title to the Mercy or Favour of God, but by virtue of his Covenant with him in Baptism. 'Tis by Baptism that we are made Parties in the Covenant, which includes all the Promises God hath made to us in his Son, and therefore ought to be the Standard of our expectations

tations from him. And whereas there are Conditions on our part, and we vow Obedience to Christ's Commands, as well as Faith and Repentance from Dead Works; if we fail in any of these Conditions, we bar our Title to the Promises which depend upon them: We cut our selves off by our own Act and Deed, from the Hopes of Pardon and Eternal Life. For where a Promise is made upon more Conditions than one, the keeping of all but one, will not inable us to claim the Promise. And why should we think that God will abate us the Righteousness of Faith (as the Apostle styles Obedience to the Gospel) or that he will accept of a short Repentance in the room of it, when the Gospel makes them equally necessary to Salvation, and we undertake for them alike in our Baptism? Faith indeed and Repentance are sufficient to bring us within the verge of the Covenant: but when we are in a Covenant-state, and have solemnly engaged to walk in the Commandments of God all our days, as we expect the fulfilling of the Promises to us, nothing less than the practice of Piety and Vir-

tue can justifie our Pretences to them. This is the Tenour of his Covenant with us; and we must not think, that God will be put off with the renewing of those Vows at our Death, which our Lives have been a continual violation of. To which may be added,

3. That the sincerity of a Death-bed Repentance can never be tried, and therefore to us it cannot be known to be that Repentance which the Gospel requires. Some Instances, we hope, there are of men that have made good the Vows which they made in their Sickness: But alas, how many of those that have out-lived their own fears of Death, have out-lived the Promises too which they made under the Terrours of it! How often have men recovered into a wickeder Life than ever, their Sorrows been but as a Morning Cloud, and their Penitent Tears as the Early Dew, which soon passeth away?

And now from what hath been spoken upon this Head, it is evident, that the Device of a Death-bed Repentance hath no Foundation in the Gospel: Nay, so far is it from that, that it tends to ruin the very design of its appear-

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ing unto men, to Debauch the Christian World, and to make Salvation cheaper (after the Direful sufferings of our Blessed Lord) than the vilest Lust that is practised in it. And if this pass for Gospel, I confess, I am to learn what Powerful Arguments the Gospel has left to prevail with the generality of its Professors (who notwithstanding their Baptismal Vow, do hardly seem to be half perswaded to be Christians) to close entirely with the Precepts of it. The best we can offer to them are, that the Religious and Virtuous Man lives a Nobler Life, and is in a safer state, than he that drills off his Repentance, and thinks it time enough to Reform when he is Dying, because he may be surprised by Death, which is a chance the other is provided against. But suddain Death happens so very seldom, and the Excellency of the Christian Life is so little understood, that considering the Guise of this World, the hardness of an Impenitent Heart, and the subtilty of the Great Deceiver of Mankind, and the violent and outragious Affections by which habitual Sinners are hurried on to their se-

veral Delights and Pleasures, no man that hath any insight into the Principles of Human Actions, can promise any competent success, if we have no better Arguments to urge than these. And indeed when the necessity of Holiness is gone (the thing which is struck at by all the Projectors of easie ways to Heaven) Christianity must be a very precarious thing, a matter of Good-will, or at most of very Ordinary Prudence, having lost its great Power and Efficacy to Reform the World. For if the Gospel will secure me of Heaven, and excuse me for not obeying the Commandments of God all my life-long, it plainly leaves me to my liberty to do as I list, which is the thing my unhappy Nature desires: And while I find my self easie, and believe my self safe in this way, I must be under an invincible prejudice against any other that can be recommended to me: 'Tis not Arguing that will reach me now; 'tis not Dry Reason that will work upon me. Oh Blessed Jesus! how many ways have men invented to shift off their Obedience to thy Commandments! But, how can I think that thou can'st

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to turn me from my ſins, if parting ſorrowfully with them when I die, be enough to bring me into the Joys of thy Heavenly Kingdom!

It is time now to draw to a Concluſion: But I fear you will hardly excuſe me, if I ſhould not ſtay to anſwer a Queſtion or two in behalf of poor Dying Penitents.

1. Firſt then, May not God in a moment diſſolve the hardeſt and moſt impenitent Heart, and caſt it into a new Frame, whenever he is pleaſed to ſhew the Riches of his Grace towards the Veſſels of Wrath fitted for Deſtruction? And whom he Sanctifies, will he not Save? Theſe, I grant, are undeniable Truths, But then we are not ſpeaking of what God can do, or may have done in ſome extraordinary caſes: But the Queſtion is, What he has Promiſed? And when he has given us a Rule to walk by, and declared he will Judge us according to it, whether he will think fit to vary from this Rule? If he will not, 'tis ſadly evident that a Late Repentance is the moſt Deſperate Adventure in the World; and that he will, he has no where told

us, and therefore we can have not Reason to Presume upon it. But,

2. Did not the Penitent Thief go immediately from the Cross into Paradice? True, but did not *Judas* also Repent, and restore the Mony he had taken to Betray his Master, and after that go to his Own Place? Was not *Judas* a Profest Disciple, and the Crucified Thief a Stranger to the Covenant of the Gospel? And which of these does most resemble the case of Delaying Penitents? They are, I grant, in no danger of being guilty of *Judas* his sin, but neither are they in condition of making so Glorious a Confession as the Penitent Thief did, when he saw the Saviour of the World hanging upon the Cross. Both these are extraordinary cases, one of which may serve indeed to ballance the other, but then we cannot certainly conclude our Good or Bad Condition from either.

3. Lastly, If the state of Dying Penitents be thus Disconsolate, what roome is there to offer any Advice or Comfort to them? I answer, it does not become us to limit the Grace and Mercy of God, which is the Founda-

tion

tion of all our Hopes; or to ſay that he cannot extend it beyond the Terms of his Covenant with us. He hath ſhewed thee, O Man, what is Good; but break not thou into his Secrets: He has probably more Mercy in ſtore than he has promiſed to beſtow, and it is to be hoped the Penitent Thief has not exhauſted the whole Treaſure. Nor do I know any Reaſon we have to think, that extraordinary Grace is more inconſiſtent with the End and Honour of the Divine Government and Perfections, than it is with the Honour and Good Government of Pious and Merciful Princes, when they find reaſon to over-rule the Sentence of their own Juſt and Righteous Laws. And me-thinks it is ſome comfort, that Good Men are generally diſpoſed to hope well of thoſe, whoſe Repentance at any time is ſignal and extraordinary. And tho all this does not mount to a ſure Ground of Hope, yet it is ſuch a one as ought to encourage Dying Sinners to all poſſible degrees of Humiliation and Repentance. This is certainly the beſt uſe they can put their laſt minutes to: If they Repent not from the

the very center and bottom of their Souls, their Damnation is irreversibly Sealed: If they do, we must leave them to the Mercy and Compassion of God: And tho we cannot promise them Eternal Life without the Fruits of Righteousness, because we have no Authority from the Gospel to do it, yet we may and ought to remind them that there are some Monuments of a Miraculous Grace, some Instances in which the Goodness of God has Triumphed over the utmost Spight and Obstinacy of Insolent and Malicious Offenders; and that the greater their Contrition is, the meeter Objects they are of his Infinite Pity and Compassion to the Works of his own Hands.

This, I confess, is but small comfort in comparison of what they might have enjoyed, had they lived in the Faith and Fear of God; but it is such as the case will bear: And if Men sin beyond the Stated Measures of Grace and Mercy in the Gospel, they must thank themselves if it will not afford them better: But they must not be angry with the Preachers of it, because they dare not go beyond their Com-

Commiſſion, and have more kindneſs for them than to flatter them into Eternal Torments.

Now what is the proper uſe of this Diſcourſe? But that knowing the Fallacy and Danger of a Death-bed Repentance, we ſhould hence learn the Wiſdom of applying our ſelves betimes to the Service of God and Religion, and ſecuring our Souls while he puts it into our power to do it. 'Tis a wonderful thing, that men ſhould give away all their Vigorous Years to Luſt and Vanity, the pleaſures of which are but for a moment, and yet hope to do a Work that ſhall ſtand good to Eternity in a few ſickly and languiſhing Hours. What ſtrange Riddle and Infatuation is this? But it is not enough to diſcern the miſtakes of others, and diſapprove of their methods to deceive and ruine themſelves, while we neglect our own ſafety, and content our ſelves with knowing where our plain Duty and Intereſt lies. Let us therefore grow wiſe by their Example, and the loud and importunate Warnings which they give their Friends, when they can have no deſign upon them,

them, but to keep them from the Tortures which they endure.

We have at most but a short time to be in this World, and every day we delay our Repentance, besides the hazzard we run by it, we certainly make our Work so much the heavier the day after: For still we have the more Sins to Repent of, and we have a worse Nature to struggle with; and should we delay on to our dying Day, what a World of Distraction should we treasure up for our selves against our last hour, when of all others we shall be the least able to bear it? And when all this is done, we cannot assure our selves that God will regard our Sorrows, any more than we have done his Calls to Repentance and Reformation of Life.

Would we consider things as we are sure to find them, certainly we should not choose to leave them at this pass, and to have no better hopes than a Condemned Malefactor has, *viz.* that tho by Law he is to dye, yet he may possibly be saved by the Prerogative of his Prince, whose Crown and Dignity, till he fell into his Hands, he

was

was always an utter and declared Enemy to. No wiſe man would hazzard his Life upon ſuch a contingency: And can there be ſtarker madneſs than to venture our Souls upon the like Iſſue, by continuing in an Impenitent State till we are leaving the World, in hopes that God will be better than his Covenant, and when the Goſpel condemns us, ſave us by a reſerve of Prerogative Grace?

Let us therefore Repent of our Sins while we may be ſure of Pardon for them, and not ſtay till it is too late, which would be a Repentance for ever to be repented of. Let us conſider what a diſmal thing it would be, when we are Dying, to have our Conſciences flying in our Faces, and accuſing us at once of a whole Life ſpent in wickedneſs and contradiction to our Chriſtian Profeſſion. And ſince we cannot ſee God without Holineſs, and therefore cannot Die with any True Peace and Comfort without it, let us reſolve, without any further delay, to break off our Sins, and apply our ſelves to the exerciſe of all Chriſtian Virtues and Graces. Let us every day, as we

draw nearer to Eternity, mind the concernments of it with that zeal and ſincerity, that we ſhall heartily wiſh we had done, when we lie panting and breathing out our Souls into a ſtate of Immortality. In ſhort, let us make our Death-beds as ſoft and eaſie as we can, I mean, by doing our great Work beforehand, and leaving our ſelves nothing to do there but to dye: This is the way, when we are tired out with the Cares and Vanities of this Toilſom Life, to find the ſweeteſt repoſe upon them: To Die in Peace, and to Finiſh our Courſe with Joy, and then our Reſt will be Glorious. I ſhall conclude all with the words of the Apoſtle, by which we may judge of the Truth and Argument of this Diſcourſe, *Be not deceived, God is not mocked: For whatſoever a man Soweth, that ſhall he alſo Reap; He that ſoweth to the Fleſh, ſhall of the Fleſh reap Corruption; but he that ſoweth to the Spirit, ſhall of the Spirit reap Life Everlaſting.* Which God grant we may all do, through the Infinite Merits of his Son Jeſus Chriſt our Lord.

Gal.6.7,8.

Ser-

Sermon V.

The Streight and Certain Way to Happineſs.

Heb. 12. 13.

Make Streight Paths for your Feet.

'TIS evident from many paſſages in this Epiſtle, that the Chriſtian Jews, to whom it was written, began to faulter in the Profeſſion of Chriſtianity, and to be in great danger of revolting to their Old Religion. Hereupon the Apoſtle, who, 'tis probable, had been Inſtrumental to their change, endeavours to ſettle and confirm them in it. And whereas the

the fear of ſuffering Perſecution was the great thing that ſtagger'd the Hebrew Chriſtians, he ſhews them at large in the Eleventh Chapter, that the Faith of the Holy Men of Old did uſe to raiſe them above any ſuch Diſcouragements; and then propoſes the Example of our Bleſſed Saviour, the Greateſt ſufferer, and the moſt Abſolute Pattern of Fortitude and Patience, in the Second and Third Verſes of this Chapter. After this he endeavours to raiſe the Spirits of the dejected Hebrews, and reconcile them to a ſtate of Perſecution, by reminding them, that Afflictions are no Arguments of God's Hatred or Deſertion of his Children; but rather of his Paternal Love and Peculiar Tenderneſs towards them; and tho they ſeem Harſh and Grievous for the preſent, yet in their Effects they are very Kind and Grateful, as *yielding the Peaceable Fruits of Righteouſneſs*, Pleaſure and Tranquility of Mind in this World, and Eternal Reſt and Glory in that which is to come. Then follows the Exhortation, of which the Text is part, *Wherefore lift up the Hands which hang down, and the feeble Knees,*

Verſ. 5, to 10.

Verſ. 11.

Knees, and make ſtreight Paths for your Feet.

By *Paths* we are to underſtand the General Courſe of our Actions; which are then *Streight*, when they lie even with the Rule that God has given us to Frame and Govern them by. For ſtreightneſs has a neceſſary relation to a Rule, and conſiſts in an evenneſs or adequate conformity to it. And then we do make our *Paths ſtreight*, when we take due care to underſtand our Rule, and being well aſſured of the rectitude of it, to order our Actions ſo as to make them Anſwerable to it; and when we have begun well, to hold on our Courſe without any ſtop or deviation from it. Now the Goſpel being the Rule of the Chriſtian Life, the meaning of the Apoſtles Exhortation to the Hebrews, who began to waver in the Profeſſion of it, muſt be this: Having a Streight and Perfect Rule before you, ſee that your Actions be conformable to it: Don't faint at any Diſcouragements, or follow any crooked and deceitful Paths, but keep to them that are ſtreight, as the Goſpel leads you, which is the Direct and Infallible

Way to Everlasting Bliss and Happiness.

From the Words thus explained, there are three things observable, of which I shall speak in their order.

1. That there is a Streight and Direct way to Heaven and Happiness.

2. That this Way may be certainly found with due care and enquiry.

3. That having found the Streight Way to Heaven, we ought to be very careful and exact in walking in it, and not yield to any Temptation to forsake it.

1st. *Observ.* That there is a streight and direct Way to Heaven and Happiness. This is supposed in the Text, which exhorts the Hebrews to make use of this Way, and implies that they were already in some measure acquainted with it. And well might the Apostle suppose that there is such a Way, without being at the pains to prove it, when it is universally owned by all that believe there is any such thing as True Religion in the World; and that is all the

the World but the Atheiſt, that is of no Religion. Very many indeed are miſtaken in their Way to Heaven: But that there is a ſtreight and certain Way thither, was never denied by the Profeſſors of any Religion; for they all pretend to be in the Right Way, how wide ſoever they are in Opinion and Practice from one another. All the Controverſie is, which of thoſe ſeveral Paths which men take to be the ſtreight and plain Way to Heaven, is truly ſo. And certainly to know this, is a matter of very great concernment, and deſerves a very ſerious and impartial Enquiry, for tho a man may fall into the right way by chance, that never enquires after it (which is the caſe of thoſe that Profeſs the True Religion for no other reaſon, but becauſe they were inſtructed in it from their Infancy) yet 'tis no virtue in ſuch a man that he is in the right: Nay, he does not ſo much as know that he is, and ſo long is in danger of being toſs'd about, and carried off from one Church and Religion to another, according as the Wind of Doctrine ſits, and the Tide of Preferment turns. He that takes

his Religion upon Truſt, and never examines the Grounds and Reaſons of it, may be eaſily perſuaded that he has no Reaſon to be Obſtinate in it, eſpecially when he is like to be a loſer by the hand, and is fairly offered another that promiſes *the Life that now is*, and pretends to give Infallible Security for *that which is to come*. And hence St. *Peter* admoniſheth the Chriſtians that fled out of *Judea* for the freedom of their Religion, to *be always ready to give an Anſwer to every man that ſhould ask* them *a Reaſon of the Hope that is in* them; *i. e.* to be able to defend their Religion and themſelves, by declaring (as often as their Adverſaries urged them to it) what certain Grounds and Reaſons they had for it. And in truth a Religion without Rational Grounds and Motives to induce us to the Belief and Practice of it, is not worth the ſuffering or contending for.

1 Pet. 3. 15.

But perhaps it will be ſaid, allowing that there is a ſtreight and ſure way to Happineſs, yet there is ſuch variety of differing Opinions and Perſuaſions about it, that it is hardly poſſible to be certain where it is, or when we have found

found it. There are ſo many ſeveral Paths, each of which are taken to be the right by thoſe that are accuſtomed to them (which yet can never be, becauſe they apparently croſs one another) that let a man be never ſo confident of the Goodneſs of his Way, there are others who, are no leſs confident that he is in a wrong Path, and muſt come over to them if he will ſet himſelf right, and timely prevent his Eternal Errors. And ſince there is ſo great a diverſity of Methods in Religion, and ſo great a Confidence on both ſides, how is it poſſible for a plain man, that would fain go the neareſt and the ſtreighteſt way to Heaven, to be ſure to find it? Thus the Sceptick argues againſt the certainty of Religion in general, and the Romaniſt thinks there is no Argument like this to confound the Proteſtants, and to prove the neceſſity of an Infallible Guide.

But ſtill I hope there is no great hurt in this Argument, and that a plain man may be ſure of finding his way to Heaven, after all the Miſtakes and Controverſies that there are about it, tho there ſhould be no ſuch thing as

an Infallible Guide on Earth. And this I ſhall endeavour to clear in the handling of the ſecond Propoſition, evidently implied in the Text, which is this;

2d. *Obſerv.* That the ſtreight way to Heaven may be certainly found with due care and enquiry; I mean, by men of ordinary capacity, ſincerely uſing the means which God is pleaſed to afford them, without the aſſiſtance of any Earthly Infallible Guide. Otherwiſe in vain did the Apoſtle admoniſh the Hebrews to *make ſtreight Paths* for their *Feet*: For, ſuppoſing them uncapable of diſcerning between ſtreight and crooked Paths, either for want of a Rule to guide them, or a faculty to apply their Rule to the ſeveral ways that were propoſed to them, it was to no purpoſe to give them any advice in this matter. They that muſt judge of their Guides by the Rule of Scripture (as all Chriſtians are required to do) muſt judge of their Rule firſt: And they that cannot judge of a ſtreight Rule, when it lies before them, cannot judge of an Infallible Guide: As he that has not the wit to know when

when a Line is ſtreight, can be no competent Judge of a Perfect Mathematician.

For the fuller explication of this Truth, it may be proper to premiſe,

1. That by the ſtreight way to Heaven, I underſtand (as it is plain the Author of this Epiſtle does) the way which God hath revealed in his Goſpel; the ſame which is there called the *way that leadeth unto Life*; *the way of God in Truth*; *the way of Salvation*, *the right way*, *the new and living way which Chriſt hath conſecrated for us*; that is, the Method which the Son of God, by his Incarnation and Preaching the Goſpel hath put us into for the attainment of Everlaſting Life and Happineſs. *Mat.*7.14. 22. 16. *Act.*16.17. 2*Pet.*2.15. *Heb.*10.20

2. By the ſure finding of this Way upon a due and careful enquiry, I mean, that Ordinary Chriſtians by applying themſelves to the ſtudy of the Scriptures (the Sacred Records of our Religion) with a clear and honeſt intention, by imploring the Divine Aſſiſtance, and making that uſe they ought of their Spiritual Guides, may certainly attain to the knowledge of all the Truths which are neceſſary to be

believed, and of the Duties required of them to be done in order to their Eternal Salvation. And this is as much as any man, that is ſincerely inquiſitive after the Way to Heaven, can deſire: For who that is ſo, can deſire to be more than certain of his way thither? Or to have a better Foundation for his Faith and Practice, than the Authority of God himſelf; who, if there be any ſuch thing as Infallibity in men, muſt be the Author of it?

Now to prove that we may be certain of our way to Heaven without the help of an Infallible Guide, I ſhall endeavour to make good theſe following Aſſertions:

1. That the Bleſſed Author of our Religion hath left us a certain Rule to direct us to Eternal Life. That there is ſuch a Rule, is as evident as that the Goſpel is the Word of God, or that the Doctrine of Chriſt is contained in the Writings of the Evangeliſts and Apoſtles. And in this all Chriſtians are agreed: Even the Romaniſts themſelves allow the Scripture to be the Infallible Rule, tho they are no great Friends to the Uſefulneſs or Perfection

fection of it. But ſtill we have a greater Authority than this, I mean that of the Scriptures themſelves, which declare that they were *written, that we might believe that Jeſus is the Chriſt, the Son of God* [*i. e.* to be the Rule of our Chriſtian Faith] *and that Believing we might have Life through his Name:* That they teach us a Rule of Life, and are *able to make us wiſe unto Salvation, through Faith which is in Chriſt Jeſus.* And hence the Primitive Fathers and the Firſt General Councils appealed to the Scriptures as the True Standard of Chriſtianity, and condemned the Ancient Hereticks by the Authority of them. In thoſe days the manner was to ſet the Holy Oracles in the midſt of the Councils, to ſignifie that they ought to be conſulted in all their Debates, and that nothing ought to be impoſed upon the Faith of Chriſtians, or decreed to be an Article of Religion, but what may be found in the Goſpel, and is ſo determined by that Infallible Rule.

Joh. 10. ult. *Tit.* 2. 11, 12. 2 *Tim.* 3. 15.

2. Chriſt having left ſuch a Rule to his Church, it muſt be ſuppoſed to be Intelligible, *i. e.* capable of being

un-

underſtood and applied by thoſe that are to uſe it as a Rule. Otherwiſe it can never ſerve the Great End it was given for; to ſay which is the higheſt Reflexion that can be upon the Wiſdom of him that gave it. The Goſpel pretends to ſhew us a ſtreight way to Heaven, but to what purpoſe, if we can never find it by its directions? If we muſt uſe it as a Rule, we muſt learn from it what we are to believe and practiſe: And if we muſt do ſo, I think that is a plain and unanſwerable Argument that we may do it: For aſſuredly God would never make a ſhew of bringing us to Heaven by a Means, which, he certainly knows would fail us, if we truſt to it.

3. The Inſtitution of Paſtors and Miniſters in the Church for the inſtruction of private perſons in the meaning of this Rule, undeniably proves that our Saviours meaning was, that all Chriſtians ſhould underſtand it themſelves: And then it is evident they may do it, ſo far as they are concern'd, and are qualified to judge in other matters. For what uſe is there of Teachers, but to aſſiſt and inform our Underſtand-

ſtandings, and help us to make a Right Judgment of Things? Or what benefit is there of being taught, if we may not uſe our Judgment when it is rightly informed, and be permitted to know when it is, and when not? This, I am ſure, is the natural priviledge of Mankind; and I do not know one natural right that our Saviour by any Inſtitution of his deprives us of: And certainly of all others he would never bar us of this, becauſe his Doctrine would be of little uſe to us without it. For what ſway is the Goſpel like to bear upon our Minds; or which way can it influence our lives, till we know the true Senſe and Uſes of it, which it is impoſſible we ſhould, unleſs we may exerciſe our own Judgments upon them? Let my Guide be never ſo Knowing or Infallible, 'tis not his, without my own knowledge, that can make me ſure of my way: And therefore, unleſs he has a way to conveigh his Great Knowledge into me, (and if he has, it is ſurely through my underſtanding) I am but juſt where I was without him, and never like to make any Spiritual Improvement by him.

him. 'Tis the Intereſt, I confeſs, of ſome Teachers, that their Diſciples ſhould not ſee which way they lead them: But thoſe whom Chriſt hath ordained to this Office, are *ſent to open their Eyes, and to turn them from Darkneſs unto Light*, that they themſelves may ſee the things which belong to their Eternal Peace.

4. Chriſtians, without diſtinction, are expreſly required to *ſearch the Scriptures*, and to *prove all things* by them, as the Rule and Standard of Truth and certainty in matters of Religion. *Search the Scriptures* (ſaith our Saviour) *for in them ye think ye have Eternal Life*, John 5. 39. implying, that as there is a Treaſure in the Scriptures, a clear diſcovery of the Way to Eternal Life, ſo it may be certainly found by thoſe that duly ſearch for it: And if it may be found in the Scriptures of the Old Teſtament, to which our Saviour here directs his Diſciples, there can be no reaſon we ſhould deſpair of finding it in the New, being infallibly aſſured, that *Life and Immortality* were *brought to the Light of the Goſpel*, *i. e.* were more Emphatically Diſcovered, being

2 *Tim.* 1. 10.

being ſet in a better Light to us Chriſtians by the New and Brighter Revelations of the Goſpel, than they were of Old to the Jews by all the Writings of *Moſes* and the Prophets. And then, if we ſeek for Life and Immortality, and follow the directions of this Greater Light, we may be ſure to make Streight Paths for our Feet, till we come to the Perfect Fruition of them. Nor are we commanded only to ſearch the Scriptures, but to *prove all things* by them, to *try the Spirits whether they be of God*, and to *judge of our ſelves what is Right*: That is, we muſt uſe our own Reaſon and Judgment in comparing matters in Controverſie with the Infallible Rule of Scripture: For ſome Rule we muſt have to Prove, and Try, and Judge by: And it is plain, the Scripture takes no notice of any other Rule but it ſelf; and that of Modern and Unwritten Tradition, as Oppoſite to it. And this is ſecurity enough againſt any Dangerous Error, conſidering that the Goſpel is as much a ſtanding Revelation to the Chriſtian Church, as the Law and the Prophets were to the Jews.

1 *Theſ.* 5. 21
1 *Joh.* 1. 4.
Luk. 12. 57

5. We

5. We find the happy Effect of this Courſe ſo far, that perſons of ordinary capacity, after a competent Trial of it, do rightly believe and underſtand all that is neceſſary to their Eternal Salvation. The neceſſary Articles of Religion are ſo viſible in the Scriptures, that it is the hardeſt thing that can be for an Ingenious Reader to overlook them. That there is but One God; that He only ought to be Worſhipped; that he ſent his Only Begotten to Die for us; that he Died and Roſe again; that as many as Repent of their Sins, Believe and Obey the Goſpel, ſhall be Saved: Theſe and other Principles of Religion are ſo clearly and fully expreſt in Scripture, that there is no need of an Infallible Interpreter to certifie for them: A common Underſtanding with the ordinary Means of Knowledge can reach the Diſcovery, I mean, without the help of a Roman Teleſcope, or ſtanding upon the Shoulders of St. *Peters*'s pretended Succeſſor. This we know the Certainty of, we feel it in our ſelves, and we ſee the Demonſtration of it in ten thouſand Inſtances, and do not think the worſe of our

Faith

Faith for being Proteſtant, *i. e.* immediately Grounded upon the Evidence and Authority of Scripture: We look upon it as our Inviolable Birth-right to judge of Plain Truths when we ſee them: And for this we have the general Senſe of Mankind on our ſide, and cannot think it reaſonable to put it to any man to judge for us, whether or no there is a God, a Chriſt, or a Heaven. That all neceſſary Truths are plain, is allowed by all Chriſtians but thoſe that make Articles of Faith neceſſary to Salvation, which are ſo far from being plain, that there is not the leaſt mention of them in the whole Goſpel. And if all things that are Neceſſary, are Plain, then (I hope) a plain man may judge of them, and without asking leave of any other man may believe them; and ſo doing he certainly is in a ſtate of Salvation: And then the Church that declares he is not, cannot be Infallible, unleſs a Church can Err, and be Infallible at the ſame inſtant.

6. It is far eaſier for men, (who implore the Direction of God, and uſe the Helps which he affords them) to find

find their way to Heaven in the Scriptures, than to find an Infallible Guide on Earth to lead them to it. It muſt be granted, that there are Obſcure, as well as Plain Paſſages in Scripture: Some Places ſo very Dark and Intricate, that they even Poſe the moſt skilful and judicious Guides: But then our Happineſs is, that our Way does not lie thorough them, and that there is Light enough in innumerable other places to direct our Steps, and to bring us in a Streight Line to Everlaſting Bliſs and Perfection. I do not ſay, that every thing that concerns our Salvation is ſo clearly revealed, that no man can be ignorant of it: But that we may know as much as is needful for us, if we apply our minds to it, and laying aſide all prejudice againſt the Truth, beg of God to Preſerve us from Error; all which we have great encouragement to do, ſince he has promiſed us the aſſiſtance of his Spirit in the ſearch of Truth.

The Church of *Rome* indeed offers to put us into a ſhorter and eaſier Method of finding out Truth, and to bring us to a Guide that will Infallibly ſhew

ſhew us every ſtep of our way: So that we need not be at the Pains of any Tedious Inquiries, nor any longer in danger of miſſing our Aim in them, through the weakneſs of our own Fallible Judgments. And who would not gladly embrace ſo Free and kind an Offer as this, provided there be no Trick or Fallacy it it? The Tryal of which will appear, if the Propoſers of this way of certainty, be able to ſatisfy us in a few reaſonable Caſes, without which (as great as the Courteſy ſeems to be) we cannot prudently Accept of their Offer. If a man ſhould freely proffer me the *Indies*, I muſt ſay it is a very Noble Gift, if he can make it good, and when he has convinced me that he can, I will thankfully accept it from him: but before he can give me Satisfaction about it, I find there muſt be a few words exchang'd between us; and therefore, if he Pleaſes, I deſire him to tell me, how he came to be the Owner of ſo vaſt a Treaſure, which is, or lately was, in the poſſeſſion of ſo many Great and Potent Princes: And which way he will put me into

Poſſeſſion of it, *&c.* If he cannot Anſwer theſe Queries (as I believe he cannot) I am ſure he can never conveigh the *Indies* to me; and therefore I will never trouble my Head more about them. And thus I fear it will fall out in the caſe of an Infallible Guide to all Chriſtians, who, were there ſuch a Church, or Perſon as they boaſt of at *Rome*, that could infallibly ſolve all Doubts, and put an end to all Controverſies in Religion, were richly worth both the *Indies* together. But before I accept of the Conduct of this Guide, I muſt deſire to be ſatisfied in a few things in reference to him. As,

1. How I may be certain that there is ſuch a Guide, or Judg of Controverſies? For I find there is a great Controverſy in the Church about it: And if I can never be aſſured that there is ſuch an one, till he has ended all Controverſies (which is the great bleſſing the Church of *Rome* Promiſes from him) 'tis in vain in this Age of Controverſies to enquire any farther after him. But ſuppoſe it were not; may I, or any other Proteſtant, determine this Con-

Controverſy by the uſe of our own Fallible Judgments? If we may, then it ſeems a Fallible Judgment may do more ſometimes, than an Infallible Judg. However, a Fallible Judgment is all the Judgment that we have, and if by it we may be certain of an Infallible Guide, which at *Rome* goes for a leading Article of Faith, I ſee no Reaſon why we may not, by the ſame means be certain of all the Reſt; and if we may be ſo, it is plain there is no need of the Guide we are ſeeking for; and then I doubt, after all our ſearching, we ſhall never be able to find him.

But there is one Argument above all, that there is no ſuch Guide, *viz.* That Chriſt never Promiſed, There ſhould be one always in his Church: And without a Promiſe from him, we can never be certain that there is. We know what is pretended in this matter, and what Texts are produced for it, but after the ſtricteſt, and moſt deliberate Enquiry into the meaning of them, we can find no Evidence of any ſuch Promiſe, nor diſcern the leaſt ſhadow or Footſtep of a viſible Infallible Guide.

We own indeed that God has Promiſed the Guidance of his Spirit to all that deſire the Knowledg of his Ways, but we the rather think that he has not promiſed any other Infallible Guide than this: For what need is there of the Inward Direction of the Spirit in the Search of Truth, when we have a Guide at hand that can lead us Infallibly into it, and ſave us the labour of ſearching after it? But did not our Saviour Promiſe to ſend his Spirit upon the Apoſtles, and were not they Infallible Guides? True, but did he Promiſe to make their Succeſſors in all Ages Infallible too? If he did, every Succeſſor has an equal Claim: And then how comes the Church of *Rome* to talk of but one Infallible Guide ſince the Death of the Apoſtles, and to Appropriate that extraordinary favour to her ſelf? If he did not, ſhe muſt ſhew us a particular Charter or Promiſe, that Infallibility ſhould never depart from the See of *Rome*, and when ſhe does that, we may allow her to be Infallible. But ſuppoſing that Chriſt had pro-

promiſed an Infallible Guide, it may be convenient to know,

2. Whether or no he has given him Authority to ſuſpend the Judgment of all Chriſtians in matters of Religion? This we muſt ſay is a diſtinct Power from Infallibility, unleſs we can imagin that our Saviour and his Apoſtles, tho they were infallible, did not know the extent of their Power: For 'tis plain they did not affect any ſuch Authority, or treat their Diſciples in this manner, but both required them to prove the Truths which they heard, and commended their Ingenuity in proving them by the Scriptures. Beſides, a Guide whoſe Directions we muſt blindly follow, without examining the Grounds and Tendency of them, ſeems to be a very improper means of bringing men to Heaven. For ſurely God did deſign, that in the exerciſe of our Religion we ſhould act like men; and not lay aſide our Reaſon and Judgment, as things that are dangerous to our ſalvation. 'Tis true, not to Judge at all, is a certain way not to err; but it is a very blind, and unlikely way to bring

Act. 17. 11. αὐτοὶ δὲ ἦσαν εὐγενέστεροι, &c.

men to the knowledge of the Truth, without which their Obedience can never be a Reasonable Service. And therefore, if any Church, or Person, under colour of Infallibility, shall assume an absolute Authority over the Consciences of men, before I resign up my Judgment to them, I must desire to be informed, not only how they come to be infallible, but what Commission they have to oblige me to believe as they please, and to strangle my own Sense and Reason, if they offer to oppose any Doctrine of theirs, tho never so absurd or contradictory to them.

But suppose still, there were Reasons to convince me, that there is an infallible Judge, and that there ought to be no Judge besides him, yet because he cannot be useful to me till I know who he is, there is another great Question to be resolved, before I can prudently commit my self to him, *viz.*

How I may certainly know where to find him? And here I meet with one vast Discouragement at the very entrance into this enquiry: Namely, that the same Church, which alone pretends to this Infallible Guide, is very uncer-

tain

tain who he is. Some chain Infallibility to St. *Peter*'s Chair, and place it in the Perſon of the Pope: But this is the moſt Intereſſed Party, as depending entirely upon the Pleaſure of him whom they call Infallible. Others ſend us to General Councils; ſome of which have condemn'd the Pope for an Heretick, and contradicted the Decrees of former Councils. But then, what think we of Oral Tradition? Or the Doctrine of the Univerſal Church conveighed by Father to Son, from the Apoſtles Time down to the Preſent Age? The General conſent, I confeſs, of the Chriſtian Church, ſo far as it reaches, is an excellent means to find out the ſenſe of Scripture. But we are not ſpeaking now of Tradition, or the Church, as a Witneſs of Truth, but of the Authority of any Church or Guide to preſcribe a Rule of Faith and Practice by Vertue of an Infallible Aſſiſtance. This is the thing we are enquiring after, and where the Seat of this Authority is; and all we can certainly learn hitherto is this, That ſeeing there are ſo many controverſies in the Church of *Rome* about it, it will be a very hard thing to find it

there. And that in the Judgment of a considerable part of that Church, a man may tire himself, and be in quest of his Infallible guide all his Days, and never come within sight of him at last. For suppose he takes the Pope to be the infallible Oracle, he is thought to be mistaken by all those that stand for a General council; and if he go to a General council, he is lost in the opinion of all that declare for single infallibility: And the men for Oral tradition think they are all deceived that look for infallibility in any one Person, or Party in the Church. What must we do now, that have so much choice of infallible guides, and nothing to determine our choice? May we pick and choose at a venture? But that cannot be safe, because they have occasion sometimes to lead contrary to one another, and therefore cannot be all infallible; and none of them speaks of more infallible guides than one. Must we then weigh their Reasons, and the Scriptures they produce for their several claims? These we have often heard and considered, and cannot but admire the confidence of men, who pretend to found the infallibility and other Prerogatives of the

Bishop

Biſhop and Church of *Rome*, upon Texts that ſpeak not the leaſt Syllable of them: Whereas matters of this importance ought to be expreſt in the eaſieſt and plainneſt Words, that he that runs may read them. If not only the Peace and Unity of the Church, but every man's ſalvation depends (as our Adverſaries muſt ſay) upon the Right underſtanding of theſe Texts, we have that confidence in the Goodneſs of our Saviour, that we certainly believe he would not expect we ſhould find out a meaning in them, that by no good Rule of Interpretation can be collected from them. And for this Reaſon we cannot think our ſelves obliged, when any thing is ſaid in favour of St. *Peter*, or the reſt of the Apoſtles, or of the Church in general, to underſtand it, and more than it implies (as theſe men would have us) of the Pope and Church of *Rome*. For why might not St. *Peter* be a Rock, and Pope *Honorius* (a *Monothelite*) and *Liberius* (the *Arrian*) no better than Waves? Muſt the Gates of Hell needs prevail againſt the Catholick Church, if the Biſhop of one Dioceſs prove not ſo Orthodox

thodox as he ſhould be? And why may not Chriſt be with his Church to the end of the World, tho he takes no greater care to preſerve it from Error than from ſinful Practice? And is it not modeſtly done of the Church of *Rome*, to engroſs all the Promiſes to her ſelf, which are made to the Church Univerſal? And to argue all along (as ſhe does) upon the Credit of this Notable Principle, That a part is the whole, which bids Defiance to all the Reaſon of Mankind.

Now ſince we cannot be ſure of our Guide, we muſt do as well as we can for our ſelves. We muſt Judge of things by ſuch Faculties as God hath given us; and if they are Fallible, we cannot help that, but find it to no purpoſe to judge at all, if we cannot be certain, either till we are Infallible, or till we can meet with an infallible Judge. But the beſt of it is, we may ſhift well enough without him, having an infallible Rule to walk by, plain and eaſie to be underſtood, by thoſe that are duly inſtructed by it, in all the Neceſſary Points both of Faith and Practice. And for Doubtful caſes, as they require a Narrower

rower Search, and the Aſſiſtance of better Judgments perhaps than our own; ſo God hath not left us deſtitute of theſe Advantages. He hath appointed Men of Wiſdom and Underſtanding to be our Guides, and he hath promiſed to aſſiſt both them and us in the Search of Truth; And if we will be directed by them in things which are above our Level, we may ſatisfie our ſelves with this, that we take the beſt courſe we can to make onr Paths ſtreight, and to ſecure our progreſs towards Heaven. In a word, we may be ſure that God is always ready to bleſs the means of his own Appointment; and that if we deſire to approve our ſelves to him in the uſe of them, either he will not ſuffer us to err, or he will not lay our Involuntary Errour to our charge.

I proceed now to the third and laſt Obſervation, which is this:

3. *Obſ.* That having found the ſtreight way to Heaven, we ought to be very careful and exact in walking in it, and not yeild to any Temptation to forſake it. The End of all the Advantages we have

have of knowing the Will of God, is that we may readily apply our ſelves to the Practice of it: If we ſtop at this, we certainly loſe all our Labour in enquiring after it. For 'tis impoſſible we ſhould reach to Heaven merely by knowing the ſtreight way, or beginning to walk in it, unleſs we hold on our courſe, and maintain it to the end. It is to be hoped, that we are all ſatisfied in our Religion, and that we know why we are ſo, having meaſured the ſeveral Doctrines and Inſtitutions of it by the Line of Scripture. And if we have done this with good Care and Judgment, let thoſe that take another Courſe be as Confident as they will, (there will be Confident Men to the end of the world we may be certain,) the while that we are upon the way to Eternal Life, and hope by the Grace of God to perſevere in it. But then I cannot promiſe you that you ſhall meet with no Diſcouragements in this way: There is no Road upon Earth more infeſted with Treacherous and Deceitful Men, that with great Civility will offer to ſhew you a Readier and a finer way to Heaven, and tell you, if you will

will but step a little out of your way, to a Friend's house of theirs, they will bring you to an infallible Man, that will save you many a weary step, and prevent a multitude of Errors, provided you will but be so civil, as to suffer him first to pull out your Eyes, which they say, only serve to mislead you. But if you will be so unreasonable as not to submit to this, you must *look to your selves*: For tho the *good man* profess a very deep compassion for the Blind and Ignorant; yet they don't think themselves bound to keep Faith with Men that have their Eyes in their Heads.

I wish we had no Occasion to understand the Moral of this, But *let not your hearts be troubled.* You profess a Religion that can bear the Tryal, and has past the Ordeal already. Wherefore hold *fast the profession of your Faith, without wavering: Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of it. Who for the joy that was set before him, endured the Cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the Right Hand of the Throne of God. And be not like children, tossed to and fro, and car-*

carried about with every wind of Doctrine, through the ſleight of men, and the cunning craftineſs of thoſe that lie in wait to deceive. Lift up the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees; and make ſtreight pats for your feet, looking diligently leſt any man fail of the Grace of God. The way to be ſtedfaſt in our Religion, is to be diligent in the practice of it. This will give it a grace in the Eyes of Men, and perhaps convince the Adverſaries of it ſooner than the beſt Arguments we can urge them with. And this will ſecure us from failing of the Grace of God in our greateſt Tryals and Exigencies, and from falling ſhort of the Glory which ſhall be hereafter revealed. I ſhall therefore enforce the Exhortation in the Text, as it refers to our Practice, with theſe two Conſiderations, and ſo conclude.

1. Let us conſider the Honour and Intereſt of our holy Religion. I need not tell you how much the Proteſtant Religion ſtands upon its Reputation at this Day, and how watchful the Enemies of it are to improve all Advantages againſt it. I would to God, we would all ſeriouſly conſider this, and

not

not betray the Intereſts of the beſt Religion by the Wickedneſs and Impiety of our Lives. 'Tis our Happineſs to Live in the Communion of a Church which affords us all Advantages of knowing the direct and perfect way to Life and Salvation. We enjoy the juſt Freedom of our own Reaſon and Judgment, and have as much Liberty as we can deſire, to conſult the Scriptures our ſelves. We may go to the Fountain Head, and try the Purity of any Doctrines that pretend to be derived from thence, even when they are brought down to us by a whole ſtream of Interpreters. So that it is to be ſuppoſed, that our Religion hath approv'd it ſelf to our Judgments; and that we call it ours, not becauſe it was the Religion of our Fathers, or had the good turn to be the Eſtabliſht Religion of the Nation; but becauſe we have throughly tryed and examined the Grounds of it: becauſe we have proved it by a Rule which cannot fail us, and do find it to be the very Religion which Chriſt and his Apoſtles have revealed in the Goſpel. Now if we have taken up our Religion upon due conſideration, and

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Judgment, it very highly concerns us, for the ſake of it, to live according to its excellent Rules and Precepts, and to be as ſteddy in our walk, as we pretend to be ſure of our way to Heaven. If we go wide from the Paths we have made ſtreight, and do not Obey the Doctrine we profeſs to believe upon clear and convincing Evidence, we condemn our ſelves, and give juſt Occaſion to the Adverſary to triumph over us, and to twiſt us with the great need we had *of a Reformation*, to make us *worſe* than we need to have been without it: We put a *ſharper Weapon into their hands*, than any they were ever able *to forge* againſt it. A Witty Man may make a hard ſhift to ſay *ſomething for Romiſh Errors*, but there is not *a word to be ſpoken for an Antichriſtian Life*. With what face can we inveigh againſt *Popiſh* Indulgences, while we *allow our ſelves* as great a liberty in ſinning as they do? If we are heedleſs, and *undevout in our Prayers*, we may bluſh to ſay, we cannot diſpence with *Latin* Service, becauſe it is an hinderance *to Devotion*. And is it not much at one, whether he that in the holy Sacrament, eateth or drinketh

Judgment

Judgment to himſelf, does it in both Kinds, or but One? Or what ſignifies a change, or no change in the ſubſtance of the Elements, to him that diſcerns not the Lords Body? Or why may not an Implicit Faith, ſerve to make an Empty Profeſſion, as well as any Proteſtant Faith in the World? And indeed, if that were all we deſign by being Proteſtants, it were hardly worth the while to be ſo; For as *without Faith it is Impoſſible to Pleaſe God, So without Holineſs* (as the Apoſtle tells us in the verſe immediately after the Text) *No man ſhall ſee the Lord.*

We that are Proteſtants, profeſs a great Veneration of the Scriptures, both as a Rule of Faith, and Manners: And therefore we can never excuſe our ſelves, if we do not Govern our Lives, as well as our Judgments, and Opinions by them: And there are thoſe that will not excuſe our Religion, but raiſe Objections againſt it out of thoſe very Actions it expreſly Condemns, and Warns us of the Infinite Danger of. It is, I confeſs, very unreaſonable, that Religion ſhould Anſwer for the Faults which

it Aimes to Rectify: Yet it muſt be Own'd a Real and Mighty Prejudice to it, to be Contradicted by its own Profeſſors, and Betrayed by thoſe that pretend a Hearty Zeal and Concernment for it.

And we have the more Reaſon to be Cautious on this hand, becauſe our Religion is ſo Excellent in it ſelf, and ſo fully Juſtified by its Learned Advocates, that it requires nothing more for its Defence and Vindication from us, than that we ſhould Adorn it by our Holy Converſations, and keep the Enemy out of thoſe Breaches which our Diviſions have made, and our Luſts have Widen'd for them. And this is our Proper Poſt: In which we may do Excellent ſervice (tho we may not be ſo fit to engage in the Field of Controverſies) merely by Exerciſing our ſelves unto Godlineſs, by keeping to the Plain Rules, and ſtanding to the Principles of our Holy Religion. This, I ſay, is our Proper Task: And by this means we ſhall utterly Defeat our Adverſaries, and put them to the ſame ſtrait that *Daniel* did the *Caldeans*, by leaving them

Dan. 6. 5.

them no Occaſion againſt us, *Except it be Concerning the Law of our God.* And for that we give them leave to Try their utmoſt skill: And if by fair Reaſoning and Arguments (ſuch as are fit to be uſed in the great Concernment of mens Eternal Salvation) they can Win the Victory, let them wear it.

I wiſh, the mean while, we could clear our ſelves as well as we can our Religion. I wiſh we could all ſhew, out of a Pure Converſation, that our Lives are meaſured by the Laws, as our Faith is by the Revelations of the Goſpel. I do not ſpeak this, as if I thought our Adverſaries had the advantage of us in this reſpect: but becauſe it may be Juſtly expected, that we, who have the beſt Religion, ſhould live at the beſt Rate; That we who pretend to underſtand what we believe, and to *know whom we Worſhip*, and have Renounc't the Errours and Corruptions that ſpoil the Religion of other men, ſhould be extreamly careful that we do not Blemiſh our own: That we do not ſtain the Purity of our Profeſſion, and Furniſh Men with Objections againſt it, by our vain and vicious Converſations.

Let us conſider the Neceſſity of walking by the Rules, and obeying the Laws of our Religion, in order to our own ſafety and Happineſs. Tho a Man knew every Foot of his Way to Heaven, and were Acquainted with all the Crooked and Deceitful Paths, which others are loſt and Bewildred in, yet if he will not make uſe of his knowledge to Direct his Steps, and keep on in the way he ſhould go, he can never arrive to that Bleſſed Place. We muſt not think to Fly to Heaven with a Wiſh, or to be ſaved by being *Orthodox*, or excuſed from doing our Duty becauſe we know it. Tho we had all knowledge, and all Faith, without Obedience and Holineſs of Life, I know not of what importance they would be to us, but only to Intitle us to the greater Damnation. The Sanctions of the Goſpel are the ſame to Men of all Perſuaſions: The worſt of which will hardly Deny, that a good Life is as Neceſſary to make a good Chriſtian, as a ſound and *Orthodox Faith*. So that 'tis not Believing as the Church Believes, nor Believing the Truth as it is in Jeſus, nor Relying upon him for ſalvation,

tion, that can bring us to Heaven, while we bid Defiance to his Laws: For he is *the Author of Eternal Salvation to them* only *that Obey him.* If we are ill Men, it matters not what we are beſides. Any Religion will ſerve a wicked Man as well as the Beſt: And become him a great deal better than the Pure and Undefiled Religion, which the Son of God brought down from Heaven with him; And which, of all Religions in the World, Denounceth the moſt Terrible Threatnings againſt its own Profeſſors, that Reject the Mild and Reaſonable Conditions of it. *To them that by patient Continuance in Well-doing, Seek for Glory, and Honour, and Immortality,* It promiſes *Eternal Life: But unto them that Obey not the Truth* (how Zealous ſoever they may be in the Defence and Profeſſion of it) It denounceth *Indignation and wrath, Tribulation and Anguiſh, without Reſpect of Perſons, upon every Soul of Man that doth Evil.* So that, if we live and dye in our Sins; 'tis not material what Church we Live, or Dye in Communion with. While we are in Bondage to our Luſts, all the Abſoluti-

Heb. 5. 9.

Rom. 2. 7. 8.

ons in the World can do us no Good. If we ſtudy to ſerve and Pleaſe God, we need not any Indulgencies from Men: And if we do not, we ſhall be never the better for them.

I muſt needs ſay (after all that has been ſaid on both ſides) I cannot ſee the leaſt Reaſon we have to Change our Religion: To leave the *ſtreight Path* we are in, and to go about by the Saints to our Redeemer, and by Purgatory to Heaven; to leave the Holy Scriptures which were written for our Inſtruction, and to Turn to *Legends* and ſtories of Saints, which a ſerious Man would think were compoſed only for Merriment and Diverſion. But tho we have no Reaſon at all to Change our Religion, yet ſurely there is great Reaſon for many of us to make Conſiderable alterations in our Lives, to change almoſt the whole Frame and Tenour of them, and to reform our ſelves, who call our ſelves *the Reformed.*

'Tis not only for the Credit of our Profeſſion, that our Lives be uniform to it, but our Immortal Honour and Intereſt depend upon it. We loſe the

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Crown of Life, if we faint in the Race that is set before us; and there is no other way to escape everlasting Death, than to persist in the way that leadeth to Life Eternal. If a man should tempt you to renounce your Faith, I verily hope the Danger of it to your eternal Salvation, would hinder you from hearkening to him: But then there is the same Danger in a Prophane and Vicious Life; and therefore the same Reason to forsake every evil way, to deny every sinful Appetite and Worldly Lust, to be cautious of our steps, and having found the Way of Truth, to keep a streight and even Course to the Kingdom of Heaven. Is it not an Article of our Faith, that no *unrighteous man shall inherit the Kingdom of God?* And shall we live in a perpetual Jar and Contradiction to our selves? To conclude, we had as good pin our Faith upon the sleeves of other men, or bestow it upon any body that will take it off our hands, as keep it only to rise up in Judgment against us.

Sermon VI.

Of Growth in Grace.

2 Pet. 3. 18.

But Grow in Grace----

'TIS hard to name any of the great Rules of Chriſtian Piety, without reflecting upon the ſenſible Decays of it in the preſent Age; an Age much addicted to talk and wrangle about Religion, very ſtout and zealous in oppoſing and maintaining the Doctrines which divide the Chriſtian World; but very cold and careleſs in the neceſſary points of Practice; without which the beſt Religion degenerates into Two of the worſt

worſt things in the World, Hypocriſie and Superſtition. This being our preſent caſe, it concerns us to look well to our ſelves, and *ſeeing we know theſe things before*, (as St. *Peter* ſpeaks immediately before the Text) to *beware, leſt we alſo, being led away by the Error of the Wicked* [the bad Opinions and ill Examples of men] *fall from our own ſtedfaſtneſs*. To which he adds this Excellent Advice, as a certain Rule to prevent the Danger of ſo fatal an Apoſtacy. *But grow in Grace.*

Grace is a Term of Various Senſes and Acceptations in Scripture, being frequently taken for Favour and Acceptance with God or Men, for the Divine Aſſiſtance, whereby we are enabled to perform the Will of God, and for thoſe Good Diſpoſitions and Habits of the Mind, which are the Genuine Effects and Product of it. In the latter ſenſe, it is the ſame thing with Vertue and Holineſs, and is moſt properly ſo to be underſtood, whenever, as in the Text, it is the Matter, or Subject of an Exhortation.

Now in this Exhortation, to *grow in Grace*, theſe two things are plainly implied:

1. A Root or Principle of Holineſs, actually implanted in us. We muſt be in a ſtate of Grace before we can make any progreſs or proficiency in it. There muſt be a ſtock before there can be an increaſe, a quickneſs in the Root before the Branches will ſprout or flouriſh, a ſpringing of Grace and Vertue before an *abounding in the fruits of Righteouſneſs*. And this ſhews to whom the Apoſtles Exhortation belongs, namely, to men that are in a ſtate of Holineſs, and have not received the Grace of God in *vain*.

2. It is here implied, That Good Men are not meerly paſſive in growing better; but may and muſt do ſomething towards it themſelves. Nay, the Text ſuppoſes they muſt do enough to make it their own Act; and that the Work of Sanctification muſt ceaſe, if they refuſe their Endeavours to farther and promote it. Did the beſt we can do, ſignifie nothing to the making us better, there would be no room for our Endeavours; and conſequently no Reaſon for all the Counſels, Admonitions and Exhortations of the Goſpel to uſe them. The Spirit of God is indeed the Author and Foun-

Fountain of all Grace; But then he has appointed the uſe of Means both in order to the Birth and Growth of it. He knows therefore, that by his Aſſiſtance, which he is always ready to afford us, we may attain to ſuch a Growth and Perfection in Grace, as is requiſite to qualifie us for the higheſt Degrees of Glory and Happineſs. And by his Direction it is that we ſhould be frequently moved and excited to uſe the means he hath preſcribed for our improvement in Grace and Piety. And this is a plain Argument, that our Endeavours are very uſeful to this End; and that as weak and imperfect as they are, our proficiency in all Virtue and Goodneſs depends upon them.

Now to make this Exhortation as uſeful and effectual as I can, I ſhall aim at theſe four things.

1. To explain the nature of our Spiritual Growth.

2. To ſhew the Proper and Effectual means to Promote it.

3. To warn you of the great Hindrances and Impediments of it.

4. To inforce the Apoſtles Exhortation by ſhewing what weighty Reaſons

ſons and Obligations, we have to be Growing in Grace.

1. To explain the Nature of our Spiritual Growth. The work of Grace is neither begun nor carried on by natural Principles, without the mighty Aids and Operations of the Holy Spirit of God, who Inables us *both to will, and to do, of his good Pleaſure.* Nor does a Chriſtian grow like a Plant, merely by the Influences of Heaven: But by improving the aſſiſtances he Receives from thence, and uſing the means preſcribed to him for obtaining new Meaſures of Grace and Holineſs. And hence we may diſcover both the Principles of our growth in Grace, and the manner of our growing in it. The firſt mover in it is the good Spirit of God, the giver of *every good and perfect gift*: And ſubordinate to it, is the Spirit, or mind of Man, diſpoſed in ſome degree to grow in Grace by the Grace he hath already obtain'd, and excited to greater meaſures by the Spirit of Holineſs, through the uſe of thoſe means, which he hath appointed for the increaſe of Holineſs in us.

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That there are degrees of Grace in good men, no man ever denied: And that the higher and more Perfect degrees are attained by a more frequent, ſincere, and diligent uſe of the means of Grace, all Divines are agreed. The part therefore which every good Man hath in his Spiritual growth, is to improve all Advantages for his growing better, *i. e.* more perfect in every Grace, and more *Holy in all manner of Converſation.* And becauſe ſome Graces have a more Powerful and Diffuſive influence, upon the Sanctification of our Hearts and Lives, and the due Performance of all Chriſtian duties, than others, our improvement in Grace and Holineſs chiefly conſiſts in theſe two things.

1. In a more conſtant and vigorous exerciſe of thoſe Radical Graces, by which the Life of Holineſs is conveighed into all the Branches and Inſtances of it. Of theſe our Faith in God is the main and Principal Root, all other Graces being Fed and Cheriſht by it, and Inabled to bring forth their Proper Fruits. The Reaſon why we Love God, which is both the Nobleſt and the ſtrongeſt Motive to Obedience, is becauſe we Le-

believe that he has all Excellent and Amiable Properties in him. And so the Reason why we Fear him, is because we believe he is Powerful and Juſt, and will by no means clear the Guilty; And we therefore Hope in his Mercy, becauſe we believe *He is Faithful that hath Promiſed.* And as Faith is the Root and Principle of theſe Graces, ſo have they a Radical virtue of their own; a Power, I mean of Diffuſing Holineſs into all parts and duties of the Chriſtian Life. Hence we are exhorted to *Perfect Holineſs in the Fear of God*; and to be *Rooted and Grounded in Love, that we may be filled with all the Fulneſs of God*; And *every man* (ſaith S. John) *that hath the Hope in him* of ſeeing God as he is, *Purifieth himſelf even as he is Pure.* To grow therefore in theſe Graces, is in effect to grow in all other kinds of Vertue and Goodneſs of God. And then ſecondly, our ſpiritual growth Conſiſts,

2. In being more frequently and earneſtly employ'd in the ſeveral duties of Chriſtian practice; In worſhiping God with more Life, Zeal, and Conſtancy: In doing good with more

vigour, and chearfulneſs: In bearing Afflictions with more evenneſs and patience: In greater Induſtry, Juſtice, and Faithfulneſs in our Temporal callings: In getting a more abſolute ſway over our Paſſions, and reducing our affections to Earthly things to a more equal and moderate Temper: In denying our ſelves the Liberties which have any apparent Temptation in them; in Arming our ſelves againſt the inſults of Inordinate anger, and the ſudden ſtarts of any ſinful inclinations; In pruning off the undecencies of our External behaviour, in abating the freedom of our Tongues, and uſing better care to avoid all appearance of Evil. Herein lies our Proficiency in Grace and Virtue, to which our endeavours in all theſe inſtances are ſtrictly neceſſary, if we aim, as we ought, at a Perfect Imitation of our great example, and to grow up to *the ſtature of the Fulneſs of Chriſt*. I am next to ſhew,

2. What are the Proper and Effectual means of our Growth in Grace. And here, ſince the nature of Grace and Holineſs conſiſts in a Conformity to the Divine nature and will, it is Reaſonable

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to ſuppoſe, that the ſame hand that drew the firſt Lineaments of it, muſt give it the more Lively and Finiſhing ſtrokes, before it comes to perfection; I mean, that the work of grace ſhould be carried on by the Operations of the Spirit, through the uſe (eſpecially) of the ſame means, by which we were *made Partakers of the Divine Nature* at firſt. And for this Reaſon the Ordinances of God are of Perpetual uſe to all Chriſtians, and the ſame duties required, as well of the Regenerate, as of thoſe that remain in a Natural State.

1. A better underſtanding of the will of God, and Attention to the Truths revealed by his Son Jeſus Chriſt. The uſefulneſs of this means S. *Peter* ſeems to Recommend in the Context: *Grow in Grace, and in the Knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt*; Implying, that a greater meaſure of knowledge is a ſpecial means of growing in other Graces; as is plain by that Parallel exhortation in his former Epiſtle, *Deſire the ſincere Milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby.* The Τὸ λογικὸν ἄδολον γάλα, *i. e.* the pure Doctrine of the Goſpel, or the word delivered without any

any Deceit, is the moſt Natural Food for the New Creature, for promoting the Growth of it, and making it every way ſtrong and vigorous in the *Grace which is in Chriſt Jeſus.* 2 *Tim.*2.1.

In the Scriptures we have a lively Draught and Repreſentation of the Divine Perfections. In them we behold all the Glorious Revelations of God's Sacred Will to Mankind, and the thoughts of his Heart from Eternity. Here we meet with the kindeſt Invitations to the Mercy and Favour of God, and the Merits of a Saviour: With the moſt admirable Rules for the Government of our Lives, the moſt Excellent Patterns of the Nobleſt Virtues, and the ſtrongeſt Inducements to a perfect Imitation of them. The Myſtery of our Redemption is here unvail'd, and Heaven, as it were, thrown open to our view, that *we* (as the Apoſtle ſpeaks) *with Open Face beholding, as in a Glaſs, the Glory of the Lord, might be changed into the ſame Image, from Glory to Glory, by the Spirit of the Lord.* 2 *Cor.* 3. 18.

By frequent converſing with the Scriptures, and obſerving the Tenour of them, we ſhall not only attain to a com-

petent Knowledge of our Duty, but to a firm and Ruling Judgment; and be thereby exempted from Error and Doubtfulneſs, which are none of the leaſt impediments to our thriving in Grace and Holineſs.

By this means we ſhall be continually under the power of conviction: The ſenſe of our Duty will be always quick and urgent upon our Minds: We ſhall feel the great Motives and Terrors of the Goſpel, the Eternal Weights of Glory and Miſery, preſſing upon our Hopes and Fears, and provoking us to every Good Work; and we ſhall thence be furniſht with a preſent Anſwer to all Temptations to gratifie any ſinful Luſt, or neglect the Opportunities of ſecuring our Future Happineſs. So that by making the Scripture our daily Study and Meditation, we ſhall neither wander for want of Light, nor be at a ſtand through any miſtruſt of our way; nor can we eaſily fail of making a good Progreſs in it, being quickned upon all occaſions with a preſent ſenſe of our Duty, and encouraged with a Proſpect of our Reward.

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2. Regular and Constant Attendance on the Publick Ordinances of Divine Worship and Service. It must be a great advantage to us to be admitted into the Special Presence of God in the Holy Assemblies of his People; And having our thoughts sequestred from the World, and our Hearts warmed with Fervent and Divine Affections, to converse entirely with him, who is the Foundation of all Wisdom and Grace: To have free access to his Infinite Treasures of Mercy and Goodness, a freedom to ask all that we want, and a promise to receive all that we ask; to be employed in the solemn Praises of God, the Great Employment of Heaven, and one of the Chief Delights of Eternity: To hear his Sacred Oracles expounded, the Mysteries of our Religion unfolded, the Precepts of it explained, the Motives to it Inforc'd, the sins against it detected and removed, and the concernment of all digested into Plain Lessons and Rules of Practice. How justly may we expect the sweet Illapses and cherishing Influences of the Divine Spirit, when we meet together for these blessed ends, and are engaged in these holy Exer-

ciſes? Eſpecially, when to theſe we add the frequent Receiving of the Lord's Supper; an Inſtitution peculiarly adapted to Confirmation and Improvement of all Chriſtian Graces. In this Solemnity we have the Tendereſt and moſt Engaging Repreſentation of Infinite Obligations, which our Bleſſed Redeemer laid upon us, to mortifie our ſins which Crucified him, to tread in the ſteps of his moſt Holy Life, and to become his *Peculiar People*, being *zealous of Good Works*. Beſides, this Sacrament is a Federal Rite, in which we ſolemnly renew our former Vows, and oblige our ſelves by the ſacred Pledges of Chriſt's Body and Blood, to remember what he has required of us, as well as what He has done and ſuffered for us: To give up our ſelves entirely to his Service, and to perform the Covenant we entred into, when we were Baptized into his Name. And what can be of Greater force to bind us to the Obedience of our Bleſſed Lord, than ſuch a ſolemn Vow and Profeſſion as this? If the Holy Bands of the Covenant will not hold us, 'tis to be feared that nothing will ever do it. Now if we

we frequently engage in theſe Duties, and exerciſe the Graces that are proper to them, this in a ſhort time will turn to a mighty account; every good Act will ſtrengthen the Habit, and invigorate the Principle it flows from: And we ſhall certainly experience the Truth of that Promiſe, Pſal. 92. 13, 14. *Thoſe that are Planted in the Houſe of the Lord, ſhall Flouriſh in the Courts of our God; They ſhall ſtill bring forth Fruit in Old Age; they ſhall be fat and flouriſhing.*

3. Private Devotion is another help to the Growth of Grace and Piety. Our Hearts are of that Temper, in the Beſt Frame that ever they were in, ſo ſuddenly cool'd, and ſo apt to return to their Natural Hardneſs, that we can never thrive long in our Spiritual Eſtate, without the conſtant Influences of Divine Grace. And ſince theſe depend upon our frequent and fervent Prayers, and the Intervals of publick Prayer are generally much longer than thoſe between our Temptations, it concerns us the mean while to recruit our ſelves by our private and ſerious Applications to the Throne of Grace, to which we are encouraged by very Gracious and En-

gaging Promiſes. And that we may do this to the beſt advantage, we ſhall do well to obſerve certain and ſtated Times of Retiring to our Cloſets, and Praying to *Our Father in Secret:* And when we meet with any Interruptions, to make them up as well as we can, either by falling into ſome Pious Diſcourſe, or by ſhort Petitions and Praiſes, which the Buſieſt Hour of our Lives can hardly, unleſs we will, deprive us of the benefit of.

The Advantages of this courſe are not eaſie to be enumerated. The breathing out our Souls to God in holy Fervours and Supplications, when there is no Eye or Ear but his to regard us, is one of the greateſt Tokens of our ſincerity towards him: And that is the greateſt aſſurance we can have that our Prayers will be heard, and that we ſhall not want Grace to help us in time of need. Beſides, it raiſes our minds into a Heavenly Frame: It keeps up a lively ſenſe of God in our Hearts: It diſpoſeth us to do him more chearful and faithful Service: It enlarges our Capacities, and widens our Souls, and fits us for fuller communications of his Favour

your and Goodneſs: In a word, it cheriſhes all the great Principles of Virtue and Piety in us.

4. To accuſtom our ſelves to conſider that God's Eye is continually upon us. The Reverence every good man has for the Great and Glorious God, when it is awakened with an actual apprehenſion of his Inſpection over him, muſt have a mighty power over his Spirit, and effectually excite him to do every thing in the manner he knows to be moſt acceptable to him. We ſee the force of this Incentive, in ſome meaſure, in the influence which a Fathers Eye, or the preſence of a Great Man has upon the Virtue and Behaviour of his Children or Inferiours. The ſight of ſuch a Witneſs of their Actions commands their Reverence, and inflames their Ambition to demean themſelves ſutably to the regard they owe to the Preſence they are in. Much more, were our Minds poſſeſt with a Lively Sence of God's All-diſcovering Eye, that He is whereſoever we are, and obſerves whatſoever we do, ſhould we find our ſelves moved to do the beſt that we can to pleaſe him; and this deſire would

quicken our endeavours, and our endeavours would improve our graces. The Objects of Faith are much greater than the Objects of Sence; and therefore the Lively Apprehenſion of an Inviſible Object, and eſpecially of Him, in whom we are infinitely more concerned than in all Heaven and Earth together, muſt needs be more Powerful than the cleareſt ſenſible Perception. And this is apparently the Ground of that Rule of Perfection which God gave to *Abraham*, Gen. 17. 1. *Walk before me, and be thou perfect.*

5. Due enquiry into the Nature and Conſequence of things, and eſpecially of thoſe Actions which are like to Determine the main Courſe of our Lives, before we actually engage in them. The want of this care has occaſion'd many ſerious and hopeful Perſons to run themſelves into a ſtate of Temptation, which in ſpight of their Future Caution, has proved a mighty Clog and Hindrance to their Progreſs in Virtue and Goodneſs, perhaps ever after. On the other hand, a timely inſpection into any ſtate of Life which falls under our choice, might prevent a thouſand Snares,

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into which we often betray our ſelves by our Raſhneſs and Folly. We ſee many caſt away at their firſt Launching out into the World, meerly by carrying more Sail than Ballaſt. Nor is any thing more viſible, than that Right Judgment at the firſt in chooſing our Callings, and contracting our Friendſhips and Alliances, conduces very much to ſecure our Virtue and make our Proficiency in it by many degrees more eaſie and conſiderable.

6. It will likewiſe contribute to our Improvement in Grace, to take a frequent view of our Spiritual Eſtate. By obſerving and bewailing our Defects and Failings, we ſhall be ſtrongly excited to amend them. And this will make us more humble, more ſenſible of our Dependence upon God, and more importunate with him for a greater meaſure of his Spirit, to preſerve us from the like Miſcarriages for the future. This will ſend us to his Mercy-ſeat, covered with ſhame and ſorrow, for the pardon of our ſins: And the bitterneſs of them will call to mind the Pleaſure and ſatisfaction we formerly enjoyed in the ſenſe of his Favour, through the Faith-

Faithful Diſcharge of our Duty to him. And this will fire our Hearts with a holy indignation againſt our ſelves, for the diſhonour we have done to God and our Redeemer, the waſte we have made of our Inward Peace, and the opportunities we have loſt of doing Great and Glorious Things for our ſelves, of eſtabliſhing our Peace with God, and inſuring our Election to Eternal Life. All which do naturally tend to provoke us to the greateſt care to approve our ſelves to God for the time to come, which is a ſteady and Univerſal Principle of true Virtue and Holineſs.

7. Laſtly, Serious and Frequent Contemplation upon the Joys and Glories of the Heavenly State, will ſurely caſt our Minds into a more Spiritual Frame, Refine our Converſations, and Improve our Graces. 'Tis true, an exact Idea of Heaven is not to be attained at this diſtance from it: But did we often conſider what we have read and believe of that Glorious Place, we ſhould certainly feel our ſelves inſpired with Nobler Thoughts, and Briſker Reſolutions in relation to it; we ſhould not ſanter up and down after earthly Vanities, nor

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give way to every Petty Diſcouragement and Mean Temptation, and ſo make our Journey more heavy and tedious than we need, as if we were afraid of coming too ſoon to our Happineſs. The Glories which are above, were we better acquainted with them, would darken all theſe inferiour Beauties which captivate our Souls, the ſmile of Pleaſures, the ſhine of Riches, and the luſtre of Honours. Did we fix our minds where true Joys and Felicities are to be found, the gloſs of worldly excellencies would vaniſh and diſappear, as leſſer Lights loſe their Brightneſs at the appearance of the Greater. There would be little danger of Loitering in the Way, or falling ſhort of the end of our Hope, if we would but keep our Eye upon thoſe Happy Regions above, and conſider what Mighty Joys are there, what Maſſie Crowns are laid up for the Lovers of God and Goodneſs. We ſhould be all Life and Spirit, even in thoſe very Duties which now go off ſo heavily with us; we ſhould cut through all Difficulties, and ſoar above all Temptations from this lower World, if the other was always in our view, and

and our Hearts were filled with the expectation of it. This would raiſe our Spirits, and elevate our Souls, till we ſhould even touch and feel the Pleaſures of the Heavenly State. And indeed the only way for thoſe that are in a languiſhing ſtate of Grace, to recover into a healthful and thriving temper, is to ſtrengthen their Appetite to Heavenly things, by livelier apprehenſions of the Glory and Reality of them. By this they will quickly come to loath the Husks and Traſh of this World, and retrieve the ſtrength and vigour they have loſt by their eagerneſs after them.

3. The third thing propounded, was to warn you of the great Hinderances and Obſtructions to your Spiritual Growth. 'Tis evident, that Remiſneſs in any of the former Duties will defeat the Deſign and Efficacy of them: And therefore every Neglect and Error in the uſe of thoſe Means is to be carefully avoided, as an obſtruction to the end of Growing better. Beſides which I ſhall briefly remind you of theſe three Impediments.

1. Falſe and miſtaken Notions in matters of Religion. Some think they were Re-

Reprobated from Eternity, and therefore never were in a State of Grace, and then to what purpoſe ſhould they think of Growing in it? Others, that they cannot fall from Grace, becauſe they were abſolutely Elected: And the ſame Perſons are commonly of Opinion, that every degree of Grace is wrought in them by the immediate Operation of the Spirit, tho they freely acknowledge the uſe of Means. This, I confeſs, is a very Ingenuous acknowledgment, becauſe it is undoubtedly true that they ought to uſe Means, and it is apparently againſt themſelves, when they ſpeak againſt the immediate workings of the Spirit. But I the rather think that their Opinions are not true, becauſe they manifeſtly tend to check and ſtifle their endeavours after Grace and Holineſs, tho I verily believe they have not this effect upon ſome very ſerious Perſons, through their Happy Ignorance of the conſequences of them. If we are ſure that we are abſolutely elected to Eternal Life, I cannot ſee why we ſhould *work out our Salvation* (as St. *Paul* exhorts us) *with fear and Trembling*, becauſe there can be no Fear that an Abſolute *Phil.* 2.12.

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Decree ſhould fail. And then to what purpoſe is it to make uſe of means, if the Operations of the Spirit do immediately produce their Effects? For if they do ſo, there would be no room left for the uſe of Means, unleſs there can be an immediate Cauſe that works its Effect by Means, *i.e.* that does not work it immediately. And what is this, but to render all the Means of Increaſing Holineſs in us, utterly vain and ineffectual.

2. Want of Vigilancy over the Faults and Weakneſſes of our Natural Tempers. When men firſt turn their Thoughts to Religion, and their Eyes inwards, they are deeply ſenſible of their more hainous and provoking ſins, and extreamly cautious of any Temptations to them, but are ſeldom very watchful over the leſſer Faults and Errors, which are deeply rooted in their Conſtitutions, and grow up from their Infancy with them. Theſe they are very apt to overlook and indulge (as if they had a Right of Protection from them) till they ſuffer them to ſhade and overtop their Graces. There is no man of ſo clear a Diſpoſition, but he has

has ſome Flaws and Infirmities with his Excellent Temper: And ſome Natures are ſo very bad, that without a mighty care to manage and improve them, nothing that is good will ever come to any Ripeneſs or Perfection in them. And if it be rightly conſidered, the want of this care is the manifeſt reaſon of the miſcarriages of Men, otherwiſe Virtuous and Good, who are often tranſported into Great Diſorders and Indecencies by an unguarded Humour, or unhappy diſpoſition, which they brought into the World with them, and without long care and watchfulneſs, is like to ſend them halting to their Graves.

3. Spiritual Pride: I mean, Pride of Underſtanding in matters of Religion, and an overweening conceit of more than ordinary Attainments in Holineſs. This alone is enough to blaſt the moſt hopeful beginnings in Virtue and Piety. This is Root of every new Sect, which brings forth the Bitter Fruits of Self-will, Schiſm, Error, Envy and Animoſity: And (I was going to ſay) whatever obſtructs the Power of Godlineſs, and the Flouriſhing of Chriſtianity in the World. In ſhort, there is nothing more

more directly contrary to the Spirit of the Gospel, than Spiritual Pride, and particularly to that humble and Teachable Frame of Spirit, which is essential to the Disciples of the Meek and Lowly Jesus, and indispensably Necessary to the improvement of all Divine Virtues and Qualities in them.

I shall now endeavour in the last place,

4. To inforce the Apostles Exhortation, by shewing what weighty Reasons and Obligations we have to be growing in Grace. It is, you see, as plain a Duty as any the Gospel Urges, and it is a very large and comprehensive one: But our encouragement is, the Spirit of God is always ready to assist us, and to carry our endeavours successfully through it; and therefore the Difficulty of it can be no reasonable exception against it: Especially considering,

1. That it is a State of Perfection, which the Practice of this Duty naturally leads us to. It is the very greatest Condition, the highest and noblest Attainment we can possibly aspire after. Holiness is the Glory of our Nature, and

and the Crown of all Humane and Angelical Perfections; ſo that every time we attain to a new degree of Grace, we acquire a new degree of Honour and Excellency. The Righteous (ſaith *Solomon*) *is more Excellent, than his Neighbour*: And the more Righteous he is, the more he advances in real Worth and Dignity above him. The Glory of conqueſt, the Enlargement of Empire, and the Affectation of deep & curious knowledge, are but Childiſh and Mean things, in Compariſon of a Godlike Temper and Diſpoſition, which is the natural Fruit of Growing in Grace and Goodneſs. Since therefore the Perfection of our Nature lies in living up to the Rules of Chriſtianity, and Exerciſing the Virtues and Graces of it, and there is Room for Improvement in the beſt of us, we ſhould greatly neglect our ſelves, and ſtand in our own Light, if we ſhould not continually aime to Grow better than we are, and to Perfect Holineſs in the Fear of God. Pro. 12. 26

2. The certain knowledge of our Good Eſtate towards God, Depends upon our Proficiency in Grace and Virtue. We cannot argue ſtrongly from the Firſt Eſſays of Goodneſs, while our

Graces are Weak, our good Resolutions untryed, or our Relapses Frequent. And while we slaken our Diligence, we shall be continually Hovering between Hopes and Fears, and never come to a clear and settled understanding of our spiritual condition. But now, no Man doubts of his sincerity towards God, while he studies to Please him, and is careful to avoid every thing that is Offensive and Dishonourable to him. His mind never troubles him while he is well employ'd, (unless it be first Clouded with Melancholy, which (as one well observes) is not a Reasonable case) but when he grows Remiss in his known Duty, or is Conscious to himself of some wilful Sin, or Deviation from the way of Righteousness; And the onely way to be eased of this trouble, and to be well assured of his Integrity for the future, is to return into the Paths of Virtue and Religion, and proceed Vigorously in them. The more we Grow in Grace, the more evident will our Good Condition be; The farther we Pierce into the ways of Holiness, the more plainly it will appear (to our unspeakable satisfaction) that we are no longer in a

State

State of Sin and Death; and that by the Grace of God we are *Delivered from the Power of Darkneſs, and Tranſlated into the Kingdom of his Dear Son. The Path of the Juſt is as the Shining Light, which Shineth more and more unto the Perfect Day.* As the Sun ſhines the Brighter, the Higher he Riſes in the Heavens, ſo the Light of the Righteous, his Spiritual Joy and Comfort, Increaſes in the ſame Degrees, by which he Advanceth to the Heavenly State. Col. 1.13. Prov. 4.18

3. Let us Conſider, that our minds are of that Quick and Active Temper, that if we do not Grow better, we ſhall be in Conſtant danger of declining in our Spiritual Eſtate, and Growing worſe. Something we muſt be doing, to quiet our Reſtleſs Deſires and Faculties: And if we don't ſeriouſly mind the Buſineſs of Religion, the Tempter and our own Hearts will find us other Imployments; And the World will Inveagle us with Gayer Promiſes, and more Charming Invitations, than any the Goſpel has, to Gratify our Senſual Inclinations with. If we once make a ſtop in our Chriſtian Courſe, we give our Cunning Adverſary the Devil, a

fair opportunity to Practiſe his Wiles and Deluſions upon us. He knows the Activity of our Minds: He obſerves which way our Thoughts rove, and our Affections Wander: What Duties are moſt Tireſome to us, and what Vanities we moſt Hanker after: And therefore he will be ſure to lay his Trains, and manage his Temptations to the beſt Advantage: And having found the weak ſide of our nature, to aſſault us where he is moſt likely to do the greateſt Execution upon us. It therefore mightily Concerns us, having begun Proſperouſly, to keep on the Growing hand; And not loſe the Ground we have gain'd, and the Conqueſts we have made over our Luſts and Vices, by ſtanding ſtill (while we ſee them Falling before us) with our hands in our ſleeves, till the Enemy renew the War, and we are Driven back from all our Good Reſolutions, and are Forc't to Retire with Shame and Anguiſh, to Review the Wounds we Received in our Diſhonourable Retreat from Virtue and Goodneſs.

4. We may next Conſider, that God is pleas'd to lengthen out the day of Grace (unleſs

(unleſs we ſhorten it our ſelves) to the End of our Lives, that we may be alwaies Growing to greater Perfection in it. 'Tis our own Fault, if ever he withdraws the Aſſiſtance of his Spirit from us, and makes our Day of Grace ſhorter than the Days of our Lives. Nothing but our incurable Barrenneſs under the Means of Grace, can provoke him to ſo high an Act of Juſtice and Severity: But that this will do it, his Declaring upon Oath that the Revolting Iſraelites ſhould not enter into his Reſt, and our Saviours Curſing the Fig-tree that brought forth nothing but Leaves [*let no Fruit grow on thee hence forward for ever*] are very Dreadful Intimations. This Conſideration therefore ſhould excite us to *abound in all the Fruits of Righteouſneſs, which are by Jeſus Chriſt to the Praiſe and Glory of God*, Who is pleaſed to wait for our Improvement, and to furniſh us with all the Means and Abilities which are Requiſite to it: And is ſo Gracious as not to Exact at once the whole ſumm in which we are Indebted to him, but accepts our obedience in ſuch Small Parcels, and poor Degrees, as we are Phil. 1. 11.

able to Pay him? 'Tis an unſpeakable Favour, that God overlooks the Weakneſſes and Imperfections of our beſt Services, and allows us time and Grace for a Gradual Improvement; And this Goodneſs and Forbearance of God, if there be any Gratitude in us, any Ingenious Senſe of the Infinite Debt that lyes upon us, will ſtrongly engage us to make the beſt Returns and Acknowledgments we are able, knowing that *when we have done all, we are but Unprofitable Servants.* And then the Danger of Forfeiting the Grace of God by our Wilful Negligence, and of Driving away his Grieved Spirit from us, and ſo Clouding and Shortning our Day of Grace: How ſhould this Quicken our Diligence, and Inflame our Endeavours after Grace, to ſerve God in a more Lively and Acceptable manner, *with Reverence and Godly Fear*? But there will be an occaſion of enlarging upon this Argument in the Next Particular; which is this.

Luk. 17. 10.

5. The ſtronger we Grow in Grace, the better we ſhall be able to hold out unto the End, without which all our Pains and Diligence in Religion will be

be thrown away. A conſtant Proficiency in Virtue, and Goodneſs is the beſt Security againſt Apoſtacy. While we go on and Perſevere in Well-doing, there is no Danger of our Falling away. All the danger is while we are at a ſtand, and are ſtrongly Tempted to Return to our former Courſes of Sin and Folly. By preſſing *forward to the Mark, for the prize of our high Calling*, we are continually getting ground for our Spiritual Enemies: And the more we keep before them, the leſs Danger we are in, of being Surpriz'd and Overtaken by them. A State of Sin and Perfection being the two oppoſite Terms of our Chriſtian Courſe, ſo far as we advance towards the latter, we leave the former behind us, and by Conſequence are at ſo much the greater Diſtance from Apoſtacy. So that, if we would ſecure our Perſeverance, it concerns us to get as Forward in Religion as we can, and not Reſt in any mean Attainments, as if we thought our ſelves at any time good enough for Heaven, and were ſure of our Crown, ſo ſoon as ever we had begun our Race. We know not what Tryals we may be Exerciſed with,

or what degrees of Fortitude and Patience, we ſhall need to ſupport and carry us through them: But certainly 'tis a great Advantage to be well Prepared before hand: And it therefore becomes us to be conſtantly Training and Exerciſing our Graces, and Daily Reinforcing our Reſolutions, to break through all the Difficulties that obſtruct our paſſage to Glory and Happineſs. If we Faint in the day of Tryal, we ſhall very hardly recover our ſelves: And if we fall away, we ſhall looſe all the Fruit of our former Labours, and *our latter End will be far Worſe than our beginning.*

I know there are thoſe that take ſanctuary at the ſuppoſed Impoſſibility of falling from Grace. I will not diſpute the Truth of this Doctrine; I will only remind thoſe who are too Fluſh and Confident of it (for ſurely it is too much for Man to venture his ſalvation upon it) that tho it ſhould be true, it may do them no ſervice: And that for this plain reaſon, that many that have taken themſelves to be in a State of Grace, and had the Character of Good Men, amongſt thoſe that were truly

truly ſo, have at laſt yeilded to the Charms of this Tempting World, and Neglecting to *Work out their Salvation with Fear*, have Outlived all the Evidences of their Good Eſtate, and the Fair Opinion of the moſt Candid and Charitable perſons. And for this Reaſon we ſhould be extreamly Cautious of Preſuming too far upon the Grace of God, and Daſhing againſt the Rocks, which many that have had the Steerage of a Religious Education, and ſeem'd to ſet out with all Advantages for Heaven, have Fatally ſtruck upon, for want of that Diligence and Circumſpection, which is Requiſite in ſo weighty an affair as that of our Eternal ſalvation. There is no doubt, but that Good Men may Grieve and Reſiſt the Holy Spirit of God: And that every Degree of Reſiſtance is a New Provocation to him, to withdraw his Grace from them: And that the oftener he is Repulſed, the more Danger there is of his Forſaking, thoſe that withſtand his bleſſed motions; And whether this may, or may not, proceed to an utter Dereliction, I am ſure we have all the Reaſon Imaginable to be Cautious of it, Conſidering

the

the Dreadful End of some very Hopeful Beginners: Who, if once they were not Really Good, were Deceived in themselves; Nay, were so Extreamly like those that are Good, that they Deceived the best Judges of Sincerity and Goodness. *Let him therefore that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he Fall*; And let us all Endeavour, by a sensible and constant Improvement in Grace and Piety, to Grow *Stedfast and Unmovable, alwaies abounding in the Work of the Lord*: And then we may be assured, our *Labour will not be in Vain in the Lord*.

6. The Difficulty in Religion will Daily lessen, and the Pleasures of it Increase, the farther we proceed in the Practice of it. The true Reason why any of God's Commandments appear Harsh and Grievous, is because we are not used to obey it; For use and diligence make any thing Easy, and all Excellent things Delightful. And hence we find by Experience, that the seldomer we do any good, the unwillinger we are to come to it again: And the more faintly we set about it, the less satisfaction we have in the performance

ance of it. But now, let us but inure our ſelves to any part of our Duty, and take care to do it but as well as we can, and we ſhall quickly perceive, that we are pleaſed with what we have done, and that it is indeed but the ſame thing to Pleaſe God and our ſelves. A Good Man is never Weary of Doing Good: And it were ſtrange if he ſhould, for it is the Nature of Goodneſs to give ſatisfaction to all that deal in it; which, I doubt not, is the meaning of that ſaying of the Wiſe-Man, *A Good Man ſhall be ſatisfied from himſelf.* When he Prays, Pro. 14. 14. or Meditates on Heavenly things with due Attention and Devotion, he is as it were in Heaven the while: And never Enjoy's himſelf more, than when he does any thing well which God requires of him. He that is hardly perſuaded to an Act of Charity, and at laſt does it but with half a Conſent, is fain to ſtruggle with himſelf before he proceeds ſo far, and ſo loſes all the Pleaſantneſs of it: Whereas he that gives freely and chearfully has no trouble in himſelf about it, but is highly pleaſed with what he has done, and finds it a *more bleſſed thing to Give than to Receive.*

And

And thus, could I run through all the parts of Christian Practice, I should not doubt to gain this Conclusion, that every thing in Religion would be Easie and Pleasant, if it were but done as it it should be; And consequently, the more we improve, and the better we discharge our Duty, the faster we overcome the Difficulties of a holy Life, and make our progress the more easie and delightful to the End. This is no Romantick Fancy, but a solid and experienc'd Truth. And how should this animate our Endeavours, and enliven us in our spiritual course, that the better speed we make, the less weary we shall be with our Journey? And that having past the first stages of it, if we do not loiter by the way, we shall gather strength all along as we go, and be less tired than we should have been by sitting still the while. Every step will yield us a New Refreshment, as it brings us nearer the glorious End of our Hope, and shortens the Distance betwixt us and Heaven.

7. Lastly, Let us consider, that the better we grow, the fitter we shall be

to

to die, and the riper for Eternity. Every degree of Grace will help to ſupport and comfort us in our Laſt Agonies, when of all the hours we have to live, we would chuſe to have our minds eaſie and chearful, to be well aſſured of our Future ſtate, and to have nothing upon our ſpirits that may occaſion any bitter Reflections upon the Lives we have led, or any miſgiving Thoughts of our approaching Eternity. When our Laſt and Determining Hour comes, we ſhall need all the ſuccours which a ſtrong Faith, a vigorous Hope, and a perfect Patience, a good Conſcience, and a Holy Life can afford us, to vanquiſh the Fears, and ſupport us under the Pangs and Strugglings of Death, to make our Paſſage eaſie, and our Diſſolution deſirable. We are generally apt, when we perceive our ſelves upon the Brink of Immortality, to ſtand ſhivering at the amazing Proſpect of the boundleſs Ocean before us, being Naturally very loth to put off from this Beloved World, and commonly very fearful of our landing upon the next. And there is nothing that can perfectly cure us of this Fear, but the lively

lively Hopes of a better Life after this, through the Mercy of God, and the Merits of Jesus Christ, upon the Terms of the Gospel-Covenant; *i. e.* our Improvement of the Grace of God, and the Talents he hath intrusted us with. Such a Hope as this will charm our Natural Fears, Disarm Death of its Terrors, and make us even glad to die, and desirous to see that happy World we have so long entertained our selves with the expectation of. We shall not be afraid to give up our Accounts, if we have been *Good Stewards, of the manifold Grace of God*, but rejoice that our *Audit* is at hand, being conscious to our selves that we have been doing the pleasure of our Lord, and *that in simplicity and godly sincerity we have had our Conversation in the world.* When we are going to God, it will be an unexpressible comfort to us to be able to say, that we have walkt before him in *truth, and with a perfect heart, and done that which is right in his sight.* And what greater happiness can we imagine, or chuse for our selves, than to sail with a due preparation of Mind, and a full Tide of Joy into a blessed Eternity?

Isa. 38. 3.

If

If there are different degrees of happineſs in Heaven, (as I think the Scripture plainly intimates to us) the beſt men in this World will certainly be the happieſt in the next. And ſince there is glory enough there to crown all our Endeavours and Improvements, why ſhould we not aim at as great a ſhare of it, and to riſe as high in the grace and Favour of God as we can poſſibly attain unto? 'Tis certain, we cannot beſtow our time better than in laying up all the Treaſure that we can in Heaven; where we are ſure it will be ſafe, and will be always in a thriving and growing ſtate, and where we ſhall find it (after a few days) improv'd into *an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away.*

Let us therefore, having theſe mighty reaſons to quicken our ſpiritual growth, aſpire every day to exceed our ſelves, and to mend our progreſs in Religion. They that are but in an Infant-ſtate of Grace, have many ſtages and degrees to paſs through, before they can arrive at any great perfection; and ſo have reaſon to be preſſing on, leſt Time and Death ſhould be too haſty for them and

not

not allow them ſpace to finiſh their Courſe with Joy. And for thoſe that are grown up to greater ſtrength and maturity, as better Fruit will be expected from them than others, ſo it would be a real ſhame and prejudice to them to come behind themſelves, and that their laſt Works ſhould be worſe than their firſt. When all is ſaid to ſatisfie men concerning the goodneſs of their ſpiritual ſtate, aſſuredly the moſt comfortable and infallible Evidence of the Truth of Grace, is the growth and flouriſhing of it. I ſhall conclude all with the Words of the Apoſtle, *Wherefore, beloved, ſeeing ye know theſe things before, beware leſt ye fall from your own ſtedfaſtneſs; but grow in grace, and in the knowledg of our Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt*; To him be Glory both now and for ever. *Amen,*

Ser-

SERMON VII.

OF

Murther particularly Duelling, and Self-Murther.

Matth. 5. 21.

Ye have heard, that it was ſaid by them of Old time, Thou ſhalt not Kill.

THe Precept in the Text was no Modern ſaying, no poſitive command of Chriſt, but one of the Ancient and ſtanding Rules of Natural Religion. It was at firſt engraven in the deepeſt Characters upon the Heart of Man, by the hand of his Creator; the written Law being only a Tranſcript or Copy of that Original. But even this, as it

was no less Authentick, was very Ancient too. Ye have heard (saith our Saviour to the Jews) ὅτι ἐρρέθη τοῖς ἀρχαίοις, that *it was said to* the Ancients, or *to them of Old time* (for so the words are most naturally rendred) *thou shalt not Kill*, That is, this Precept was delivered to their Fathers at Mount Sinai under the hand-writing of God himself, and was often repeated in after Ages by his Priests and Prophets. But it seems, it was not throughly Understood in our Saviours time, the Jews apprehending themselves clear of this Commandment, if they did not Kill and Murther one another. To rectify this great mistake, our Saviour (being about to give them a larger and more perfect exposition of the Law, than the Scribes and Pharisees, the famous Expositors of that Age, generally did) expresly tells them, that causeless and reproachful Anger is forbidden under the greatest Penalties of this Commandment. *v.* 22. *But I say unto you, that whosoever is Angry with his Brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the Judg-*

ment:

ment: and whoſoever ſhall ſay to his Brother, Racha, ſhall be in danger of the Counſel: but whoſoever ſhall ſay, Thou Fool, ſhall be in danger of Hell Fire. viz. Becauſe this quarrelſome and provoking Paſſion of Anger, is (as *Ariſtotle* obſerves) πάθος φόνων ἄιτιον, the ordinary Principle and Cauſe of Murthers: and therefore very Sinful in it ſelf.

'Tis not my deſign at this time, to inſiſt upon our Saviour's Improvement of the ſence of this Law, otherwiſe than the ſtating of particular caſes may lead me to it: but to treat of that, which all the World are agreed, is the meaning of it; And the rather, becauſe the World has had time (and it ſeems, has been no ill husband of it) to wear off ſome of the very deepeſt Impreſſions of this Ancient Commandment.

The Scribes and Phariſees had indeed run the people into many groſs miſtakes, and concealed the beſt part of their Duty from them, by their falſe and frigid Interpretations of the great Commandments of God. But,

to do them right, they were much better expounders of this Law, than many of our Modern Chriſtians, who with Pens of Steel, and in Letters of Bloud, are ready to juſtify, that Killing (for Honour) is no Murther; And that it is rather an Act of Mercy and Prudence, than of Cruelty and Diſobedience, when we are oppreſt with the Miſeries of this Life, to find the ſhorteſt Way we can into the next, and to put an end to our Own Lives, when they are leſs deſirable than Death it ſelf.

Theſe are the Sentiments of Men of very different Complexion. The former are generally Men of Flame and Spirit, of a hot ſanguine Temper; which is ſeldom reckon'd the beſt Friend to a ſolid Judgment; The latter for the moſt part are of a Melancholy Conſtitution, and while their Underſtandings are clouded with that dark Humour, muſt needs ſtand but in an Ill light to diſcern the Truth. But what ever their Judgments are in other matters, they ſeem to have clean forgot the Primary and moſt obvious meaning of what

what was ſaid of Old time, *Thou ſhalt not Kill.*

Which Precept, being expreſt in very few Words, will require the larger Explication: and the rather becauſe it is undoubtedly lawful in ſome caſes to Kill, and theſe muſt be known before we can certainly Determine wherein the nature of the hainous Sin of Murther conſiſts, which all men agree to be forbidden in this Law. For theſe Reaſons, in ſpeaking to theſe Words, I ſhall ſhew,

1. In what caſes it may be juſtly ſuppoſed, that Killing is not forbidden is this law.

2. What the Sin of Murther, or the Killing here forbidden is.

3. Wherein the Hainouſneſs of this Sin conſiſts. And then I ſhall conſider.

4. Whether it be lawful or not, to Kill a Rival in a Quarrel of Honour: or to Kill our ſelves when we are grown weary of our lives.

1. In what caſes it may be juſtly ſuppoſed, that Killing is not forbidden in this Law. Life is the gift of God, which he beſtows upon us as

a thing ſacred, to be preſerved for his Uſe, and not diſpos'd of without
Gen. 2. 7. his leave and pleaſure. It is he that Breatheth into Man the breath of Life, and being abſolute Lord of it, there is no Queſtion but he may reſume it when and by what Inſtruments he pleaſes. And that there are Crimes worthy of Death, both the Scriptures and Natural Reaſons do aſſure us. Yea ſuch Crimes their are, as, were they not ſometimes puniſht with Death, would ſuddenly daſh all human Society in pieces, and bring the World into ſuch confuſion that there would be no living amongſt men. And therefore it may be reaſonably preſumed, that Killing is not prohibited in all caſes. For inſtance,

When a Magiſtrate puts an Offendor to Death, that is worthy of it, in a regular courſe of Juſtice, he is not to be charged with the Breach of this Law. He has his Authority from God, the Supreme Judge and Sovereign Lord of Life and Death; He Acts as his Miniſter, by expreſs Commiſſion from him, and there-

fore is Innocent of all the Bloud that is ſhed by the Sword of Juſtice, and hence St. *Paul* calls the Magiſtrate *a Terrour to Evil Workers*, becauſe *he beareth not the Sword in vain, being the Miniſter of God, a Revenger to execute Wrath upon him, that doth Evil.* Nor hath God only given a General Commiſſion to Seize the forfeited Lives of great and haynous Offenders, but in ſome caſes (as in that of the Murtherer himſelf) He particularly Commands the Uſe of this ſeverity, as a ſtanding Rule of of Equity and Juſtice [*Gen. 9. 6.*] *For who ſo ſheddeth mans Bloud by man ſhall his Bloud be ſhed.* And for the ſame reaſon. a *Rom.* 13, 3. 4.

Killing in the Wars, when the cauſe is Juſt, and the War neceſſary for the Preſervation of the Publick, is no part of the meaning of this Law. For it is not to be ſuppoſed, that God who ſets up Kings and Governments for the Defence of the common Safety, ſhould reſtrain them from Drawing the Sword of War, when there is no other means to preſerve it. The Swords of Princes

are the greateſt Inſtruments of Providence in the World: and the Beſt and Nobleſt Uſe of them, is the Protection of their Subjects from Oppreſſion and Violence, in the Enjoyment of all the Bleſſings of this, and the Advantages for a better Life, which the Bounty of Heaven hath inricht them with. And therefore our Saviour never went about to tye the hands of Sovereign Princes, or States, from the uſe of this ſharp and laſt Remedy, in a Juſt and Neceſſary Cauſe: nor was the Goſpel ever accuſed for being an Enemy to the Throne, upon this account. There being no Tribunal upon Earth high enough to decide the Quarrels between Independent Governments and Nations, it is a natural and ſtrong Preſumption, when all amicable ways of Peace and Reconciliation fail, that God approves of the injured Party's Appealing to him in the Field of War, as the ſupreme Judge and Guardian of Right and Innocence. And by conſequence, a Souldier that ſerves in a lawful War, is not forbid to Kill the Enemy of his Prince

Princes and Country: he is in this Caſe a Miniſter of Divine Juſtice, being inveſted with Authority from him, *to whom vengeance belongeth.*

Theſe are Publick caſes, in which the Authority of God over the Life of Man, is manifeſtly derived immediately to the Sovereign, and by him to inferior Magiſtrates and diſpenſers of Juſtice. Beſides which,

It may be reaſonably preſumed, that when a private Perſon is deſperately Aſſaulted, and in the neceſſary Defence of his own Life takes away the Invaders, he hath done nothing againſt the Intent of this Law. Every man hath a natural Right to defend the Life which God hath given him, againſt him that ſhall attempt by unjuſt or Illegal Violence, to wreſt it from him. This alſo, as well as Life it ſelf, is the gift of God. It is a Debt we owe to the Lord and giver of Life, to keep it for his ſervice, till he is pleaſed to call for it, which he never do's by the hand of a Murtherer. And therefore when we are reduced to that Extremity, that we can neither Fly to the Protection

Protection of the Magiſtrate, nor eſcape with our Lives with out taking away the Life of him that Aſſails us, if he Periſh in his wicked Enterpriſe, his Bloud will not be Required at our hands, 'tis better for the Publick to loſe a Bad than a Good and uſeful Member: and when the caſe is ſuch, that one of them muſt fall by the others hand 'tis reaſonable to ſuppoſe that both God and his Miniſters of Juſtice do agree in the ſame choice, and by a virtual Commiſſion impower the Innocent Perſon to execute their Vengeance upon the guilty, and to ſlay the Invader, rather than be Murthered by him. And this, I think, is the ſenſe of our Laws: and was ſo of the Roman; which allowed the Killing of a Thief in the day time, *Si ſe telo defenderit*, if he offered to make uſe of his Weapon; And much more may we preſume upon the lawfulneſs of ſaving our lives, when we are Aſſaulted with a Mortal Violence; and it is evident, after all our care to prevent and eſcape it, that unleſs we immediately return it, there is but a

Moment

Moment between us and Death.

Theſe are all the ordinary caſes in which it is lawful to take away the Life of Man. There is one indeed of a more Heroical Nature, which has fair Pretences to the like Immunity from this Law: *viz.* When a Man is caſt into thoſe Circumſtances, that either he muſt yield up the Life of his Friend (that is as his own Soul) or ſave it by taking away his Enemys from him. But this Caſe is liable to ſuch infinite abuſes and variety of Circumſtances, that as the Tenderneſs of our Laws in this matter ſhews the Wiſdom of our Law-givers, ſo it is parhaps the beſt light that can be given into it.

2. The Second thing was to ſhew, what the Sin of Murther, or the Killing here forbidden, is; by what hath been ſpoken it is eaſy to apprehend that this Law Prohibits the bereaving our Neighbour of his Life without Authority, Juſtice, or Neceſſity enforcing to it. The Inſtances of which are, when a man of his own motion compaſſes the Death of another, in a wilful, Treacherous,

ous, Revengeful, or ſportive manner: or is acceſſary to it at the Inſtigation of any Perſon not inveſted with competent Authority; whether this be done to cover our Shame, or to heal what we call our Honour, or with reſpect to any convenience, Satisfaction, or Advantage to our ſelves; whether we do this by open Aſſault and Violence, or by ſecret and malicious Craft: under the colour of Religion or Law; in the Face of the Sun, or under the Mask of Night; whether immediately by our ſelves, or by wicked Inſtruments, by Purjury or Poyſon, by falſe Suggeſtions, evil Counſel or enticements, or any other Means or Method tending to the untimely Death and Deſtruction of our Neighbour.

This is the Sin of Murther directly forbidden in the ſixth Commandment. The firſt and immediate Deſign of which, is to preſerve the Life of our Neighbour: which is generally of all other Bleſſings the deareſt to him, and ought to be highly valued, becauſe all the reſt of his enjoyments, and advantages of doing

doing good (at leaſt) in this World do depend upon it.

Now it muſt be ſuppoſed, that God, who forbids the Killing of our Neighbour, and expreſly Commands us to love him as our ſelves, does by conſequence alſo forbid the Killing of our ſelves. For we have no more Power over our own, than we have over the Lives of other Men. *Have we not all one Father? hath not one God Created us?* and hath he not Created us after his own Image? the preſervation of which in Man is the manifeſt end and intention of this Commandment. But of this I ſhall have occaſion to ſpeak more fully under the laſt General. Mal. 2. 10.

3. The next thing to be ſpoken to, is the hainouſneſs of the Sin of Murther. It is generally condemned by the voice of God and Men, as one of the greateſt ſtrains of Wickedneſs and Inhumanity: and is indeed a crime of the largeſt ſize, and the higheſt Provocation, of any againſt the ſecond Table of the Law. The very Relation of the Fact ſtrikes every Innocent Breaſt with Horrour, and

and raiſes a mighty Indignation againſt the Murtherer, The mean while his own Conſcience purſues him; and whither ſoever he flyes, his Accuſer, Witneſs, and Judge are with him, the Altar is no Sanctuary to him; for God, who is greater than his Conſcience, hears the dreadful Cry of his Sin, ſtrongly importuning him to haſten down his Vengeance upon him. We have an inſtance of this in the firſt Act of this kind that ever was Committed: *The Voice of thy Brothers Bloud* (ſaith the Lord to *Cain*) *cryeth unto me from the Ground*, *Gen.* 4. 10. And, 'tis obſervable, how quick and ſevere an Anſwer it received [11,12. verſes.] *And now art thou curſed from the Earth: a Fugitive and a Vagabond ſhalt thou be upon it.*

Nay the Malignity of this Sin is ſuch, that it diſiles the Land where it is Committed, and leaves a guilt upon it, that is not to be expiated but by the Bloud of the Murtherer. And therefore no Sanctuary was provided for him in *Iſrael*. and if he fled to any of the Cities of Refuge,

he

he was thence to be taken by the ſpecial Command of God, and immediately given up to Juſtice; *Thou ſhalt take him* (ſaith God) *from mine Altar, that he may Dye*, Exod. 21. 14, and on this account God is ſaid to *make Inquiſition for Blood*: i. e. Pſ. 9. 12. to ſearch out the ſhedder of it, and to drive him out of all his Refuge, till he fall into the hands of his inexorable Juſtice.

Now ſince there is ſo terrible an outcry againſt the Murtherer: ſince Heaven and Earth are ſo highly incens't againſt him, and ſo much concern'd to Puniſh him, there muſt be a more than ordinary Malignity and Provocation in the Sin, which calls ſo loud for ſo ſolemn a Vengeance. And whereinthis conſiſts, will appear with the leaſt glance of our Thoughts upon theſe Particulars.

1. That it bids Defiance to the Majeſty and Authority of God, and in the nature of it directly tends to extinguiſh his Government in the World: It ſnatches the Sword of Juſtice out of his hand, and employ's it

it to the Deſtruction of his Creatures and Subjects, contrary to his declared will, and moſt ſacred Prerogative. every time this Sin is puniſhed in its kind, two at leaſt of his Subjects are caſhiered out of the Land of the living, the Kingdom he hath Founded amongſt men.

It is a peculiar affront to the Divine Nature, as it defaces the Image of God in Man, on this account it is ἱεροσυλιῶν ἡ μεγίστη, the very greateſt Sacrilege, as *Philo* calls it: a robbing God of that Creature which he hath appointed to repreſent him in this lower World, which approacheth the neareſt in Perfection to him, being made for his own ſociety, and of all his works hath the livelieſt reſemblance of Divinity upon it. And therefore, when God pronounceth Gen. 9. 6. Sentence upon the Murtherer [*who ſo ſhedeth Mans Bloud, by Man ſhall his Bloud be ſhed*] he aſſigneth this reaſon for it; *For in the Image of God made he Man.*

3. Murther is an Act of exceſſive Miſchief and Cruelty to our Neighbour: the utmoſt wrong that Malice,

Malice aſſiſted with Rage and Violence, can do him. Life, beſides the the natural Sweetneſs of it, is the Foundation of all other Bleſſings, which we do or can enjoy in this World. It alſo gives us a bleſſed opportunity (and the only one we can have) of laying a good Foundation for Eternal Life. And therefore it muſt be an inconceivable Damage to be wrongfully deprived of ſo vaſt a Benefit, and hurried out of ſo dear an Enjoyment; to be ſtript Naked to our very Being and Eſſence, and turn'd out, perhaps in a Moment, into a miſerable Eternity. This loſs can never be repaired, or ſo much as computed unleſs we could count the years of Eternity, or had certain knowledge of the future Eſtates of men, and were ſure that Heaven ſtood always open as a Sanctuary to thoſe, whom ſome men in their Rage and Madneſs judge unworthy to live upon the Earth.

4. It is an injury of vaſt extent in reference to the publick. It is the grief of all men that have any Bowels or tenderneſs of Nature in

them, and a ſignal Prejudice to thoſe that are in Authority, the Magiſtrate is robb'd of a Subject by it; his right of Judging and doing Juſtice between men, is violently aſſaulted and raviſhed from him. His Laws, the great Security of mens Lives and Properties, are broken and contemned; the Publick Peace, his peculiar Charge and Province, is interrupted and violated; evil Men, ſo long as the Murtherer lyes conceal'd, or in caſe he eſcapes the Law, are encouraged by his example to the like cruel and diſtructive Practices. This creates a diffidence in Men, makes them ſhy and diſtruſtful of one anothers Society. Beſides all this, Murther many times proves the Ruine of a worthy and uſeful Family, by taking off the Head, or lopping ſome or other of the more Hopeful and Flouriſhing Branches. All which Injuries do apparently tend to the diſſolution of the Publick Peace and Security.

5. If we look to the Rice and Cauſes of this Sin, they are ſome of the greateſt Vices which reproach and vilify

vilify Humane Nature. The moſt common and viſible Cauſes of it are *Covetouſneſs*, which is the *root of all evil*, and the Counter-part of Idolatry: Luſt, the Mother of Shame: exceſſive Pride and Envy, which *reſteth not, unleſs it cauſes ſome to fall*: a Cruel Deſperate, Malicious, and Revengeful Temper, fermented with helliſh Rage and Fury. Such are the Vices which prompt and irritate men to this Savage and unnatural Wickedneſs; than which nothing is more contrary to the Spirit of the Goſpel, which is all Kindneſs, Meekneſs, and Charity; nothing more unlike the Temper of our Bleſſed Saviour, his gracious Deſign in coming into the World, his pacifick Doctrine and Example to it, and his moſt charitable and obliging manner of leaving it. Pro. 4, 16.

This is a true Indictment of the Sin of Murther, which ſhews it to be a Monſtrous and moſt Hainous Crime: an Action entirely and extremely evil, with out the leaſt ſhadow of a good Circumſtance in it. For a Chriſtian therefore, a Diſciple

of the Croſs, to be guity of it, is under his own hand (the Fatal Inſtrument of this Horrid Fact) to Renounce all Right and Title to the Merits of him, who for our ſakes ſuffered upon it.

And now, becauſe the great enemy and deceiver of Mankind, who was himſelf *a Murtherer from the beginning.* has found out wayes to palliate the hainouſneſs of this ſcarlet Crime, and betray Men into a preſumption of the Lawfulneſs of it in ſome Caſes,

Joh. 8, 44.

4. I ſhall, in the laſt place, more largely conſider theſe two, *viz.* the Killing of another in a Quarrel of Honour; and putting an end to our own Lives, when we are grown weary of them.

1. Killing another upon a Challenge or Point of Honour, to ſatiate our Revenge, or to puniſh the Affronts and Injuries which he offers to us. I cannot ſeriouſly think, that any man, while he is himſelf, I mean, while he is under the Government of Reaſon and hearkens to the cool Dictates of it, do's really approve of

this, as a lawful and worthy Action. But it is far more incredible, that a Profeſt Chriſtian, that is competently inſtructed in the Doctrine of Chriſt, and Believes what he profeſſes, ſhould venture his Life and Salvation upon the credit of this Doctrine, That it is lawful to Kill the man that Affronts him. For unleſs we could hope to change the Natures of things, as eaſily as we do the Names of them, a voluntary taking away the Life of Man by a private hand, without Authority from God or his Miniſters of Juſtice, is and will be the Sin of Murther to the Worlds End; And then it will be ſo, when we have dreſt it up with all the modiſh Names and flouriſh as we can put upon it. And the Killing an Adverſary in a Duel, for a ſcurvy Word or a rude Action, will be one of the deepeſt Stains of Honour, and an Act of the higheſt Injuſtice to our Neighbour, if the breach of the ſixth Commandment be ſo.

When all is ſaid that can be, in favour of it, it is ſtill a private Revenge upon the Life of Man, which

God has impaled and reſerved to his own Uſe and Diſpoſal: forbiding all Perſons, but thoſe that Rule in his ſtead, or may juſtly preſume upon his or their Commiſſion, in any Caſe to touch or Invade it; And therefore to do it in Revenge of Honour, is a manifeſt violation of this Law: ſince neither God, nor the Magiſtrate, that bears his Authority, have made either of the contending Parties the diſpenſers of their Juſtice, but reſerved the matter to their own Tribunals. So that here the Queſtion is not, who gave the Affront of what Nature it was, or who ſent the Challenge? But the proper Queſtions are, who gave thee Power over thy Brother's Life? Who preſcribed his Heart-bloud as the only ſalve for thine Honour? And who is the lawful Judge and Revenger of the wrong thou ſuſtaineſt by him? And if the matter be put upon this Iſſue, I may almoſt leave it to every mans Conſcience to determine what the Verdict will be.

For a private Man to Revenge himſelf in any kind, is *Uti Jure aliena*

to

to uſurp another mans Right; which is always unjuſt: and then for one, in his ſtation, to invade the moſt ſacred Prerogative of his Prince to the deſtruction of his Subjects, muſt have all the degrees of Injury and Injuſtice in it, that can be eaſily imagined: Beſides,

To come to the Plea of Honour, the Life of Man is infinitely too precious a thing to make Satisfaction for the little Affronts (and very little, God knows, they are many times) for which men challenge one another to Fight and Dye. It vaſtly exceeds all the Evil, which any man ſuffers by another in his good name. And ſurely, it is not like a Man of Honour, or indeed of common Juſtice and Equity, to inſiſt upon a Satisfaction (as every one that engageth in a Duel do's) ſo extremely, in real Value, beyond the injury he ſuffers. And I verily think, I now ſpeak the unfeigned ſenſe of his own Mind, when he ſees his Rival groveling in his Bloud, when he reflects upon the ſad Trophies of his Killing Honour,

and has ſurfeited himſelf with his unnatural Revenge.

The Occaſions of Duelling are obſerved, for the moſt part, to be either too ſmall and baſhful, or too ſhameful and reſerv'd, to appear in a Court of Judicature; But let the Calumny be never ſo foul, or publick, or ſo malicioufly contrived, Nothing ſtains like Bloud: which conſideration alone ought to Reſtrain every man, that is tender of his Honour or Salvation, from ſhedding it, upon the higheſt Provocation that can be given him.

But more than this, there are other ways of healing our Reputation, and living in brighter Fame than ever, in the eſteem of the wiſeſt and beſt Judges of Honour; *The Law is open*, let the Parties Implead one another: Or if they muſt be fighting, let thy King and thy Country bind the Lawrels of Victory about thy Head, or Embalme thy Memory. This is certainly more Honourable then to Kill the worſt Man upon Earth in a private Quarrel, and makes the Caſe of Duelling

extremely different from that of one mans Killing another, when he is forſt upon it in his own Defence.

And after all, I hope, it is no Affront to be reminded that we are Chriſtians: nor any diminution of Honour, to adhere to the Rules of our Holy Profeſſion. Great Spirits, as they are better fitted than others for great and excellent things, ſo (as *Plato* obſerves) they are Subject to great Failings and Errours. They have commonly very quick and piercing Apprehenſions, and are very lively in the management of the greateſt and moſt difficult Affairs; but are not always ſo happy in their Memories, (if I may ſo expreſs it) as to forget the Injuries that are offered them, in Imitation of him who forgave his Enemies, who forbid the drawing of the Sword in his own Quarrel, and expreſly told his Diſciples, that he *came not to deſtroy Mens Lives, but to ſave them.* And ſince the Son of God *ſuffered the contradictions of Sinners*, why ſhould the Diſciple aſpire to be above his Maſter?

Αἱ μεγάλαι φύσεις μεγάλας ἐκφέρουσι τὰς κακίας.

Luk. 9, 56.

ſter? I am ſure, to Act contrary to the Author of our Religion, looks as if we were aſhamed of being thought his Diſciples; And if we are not, we cannot think it too great a condeſcenſion, for his ſake and our own. To conſider,

1. That the Pretence of Honour in the preſent Caſe, is apparently contrary to the Honour of our Bleſſed Lord and Redeemer, and the Rules he has given us to live by; If we believe him to be the Son of God, we cannot deny, but his Laws are of much better Authority than any of thoſe Rules of Honour, which ſome Men preſcribe to themſelves. Now our Saviour was ſo far from allowing men to Kill one another in a Quarrel, that he forbids all Quarrelling and Provocation in Word or Action; and Repreſents the Danger of thoſe Liberties which men give to their Paſſions, tho' they proceed no farther than to Reproachful Language, to be no leſs than that of Hell-Fire. He alſo requires us to forgive our Brother, as often as he Offends; *And not to revenge our*

verſe, 22. of this Ch.

Mat. 18. 22, Ro. 12. 19,

ſelves,

ſelves, but to give place unto wrath; and has taught us to Pray for Forgiveneſs at Gods hand, *as we forgive them that Treſpaſs againſt us.* Unleſs therefore, to Kill be to forgive, and to break Chriſt's Commandments muſt go for honouring him, no Chriſtian can engage with Honour in a ſingle Combat: and I cannot Imagine with what Succeſs he can hope to do it, while he Fight againſt Heaven and graples with one, who, he knew is infinitely ſtronger than himſelf.

2. This is to fall greatly Short of the Righteouſneſs of the Scribes and Phariſees, which our Saviour tells us (in the verſe immediately before the Text) unleſs we *exceed*, we ſhall *in no Caſe enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.* Theſe men (as I obſerved before) never denied, but that Killing a man, either in Hot or Cod Bloud, without Publick Authority, was a Notorious Violation of God's Commandment. Nay to do this in Hot Bloud, was in their opinion a Crime worthy of Death; as is plain in the Caſe of *Barabbas*, who by

by their Law was ſentenc'd to dy,
Mark. 15. 7. at the time of our Saviour's Crucifixion, for commiting *Murther in the Inſurrection.* And accordingly there was no Diſpute between our Saviour and the Jews concerning this meaning of the Law; And I heartily wiſh our fighting Gallants would conſider, whoſe Followers they are, and whether they alſo do not prefer *Barabbas*, before *Jeſus*, and under pretence of Revenging their own, lay his, with their own, Honour in the Duſt.

3. For men to ſtake their Lives in a Duel, is to run the moſt deſperate hazard; I mean, of dying in a Sin, which ſeldom allows a few moments to Repent of it; or of Killing another Perſon, it may be their old dear and confident Friend; and perhaps eternally, by cutting off his time of Repentance, and making his Peace with God. He that attempts to Kill his Brother, whether he Kills him or not, mortally hates him; for he would be the Death of him if he could, and then I fear, he Forfeits ſomething more than his

Honour

Honour that attemps it, For St. *John* tells us, *He that hateth his Brother, is a Murtherer; and we know that no Murtherer hath eternall Life abiding in him.* And this being the Caſe of Duellers what a dreadful venture is it, to ſtake two precious Lives, and two Immortal Souls upon a mere imaginary point of Honour! If this be the Honour of Chriſtians, whoſe Religion (as St. *James* deſcribes it) is *firſt pure, then peaceable, Gentle, and eaſy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without wrangling* [ἀδιάκριτος] *and without hypocriſy*, then let Light and Darkneſs embrace, and the plaineſt contradictions aſſume the Names of the brighteſt Reaſon and Truth.

1 *Joh.* 3, 15.

Jam. 3, 17.

And now, I hope, it is worthy of a ſerious thought, whether this be not enough to ballance the mighty pretence of Honour. I know it is commonly ſaid, that a Gentleman and a Man of Honour, ought not to put up an Affront, when it is in his Power to Revenge it; But it is plain, that a Chriſtian of the beſt Rank and Quality ought to do this; and that great

great Men must be Judged by the Gospel, whether they will think fit to Live by it or not.

2. For the Case of Self-Murther, or casting away our own Lives when we are weary of them. If we look to the Reason of the Commandment, *Thou shalt not Kill, viz.* because every man bears the Image of God, it is as plain a violation of it to Kill our selves, as to Kill any other man. And since we are commanded to Love our Neighbour *as our selves*, and the Love of our selves is the Standard of our Love to him, it follows that we have as great Obligations to the full, to be tender of our own Lives, as of his; and therefore if it be Murther to Kill our Neighbour, it must be at least as great a crime to Kill our selves. Nay, in some respects it exceeds all the instances of Inhumanity and Vice, and transcends the most cruel and Crying Sins. For,

1. To Kill our selves is the most unnatural Murther that can be, if we consider how deeply the principle of Self-preservation is planted in

in our Nature: and that it is a Law in our Minds, teaching us to abhor the Deſtruction of our ſelves, and to take the beſt care we can to preſerve our own Life and Being, there can be no ſuch unnatural Murther as the putting of our ſelves to Death. There is no Natural Union in the World ſo dear and intimate as that of the Soul and Body; nor any that hath greater Intereſt depending upon it, both in reference to this and the Future State: And therefore nothing can be more contrary to the voice and dictate of Nature, than the wilful Diſtruction of it, by the ſame Perſon that is moſt nearly concerned to Preſerve and Enjoy it.

2. It is, of any Sin, the moſt directly oppoſite to the ſaving condition of Repentance; which is a remedy for all other Sins, but this. Self-Murther is a Sin of that quick diſpatch, and that deſperate Nature, that it leaves a Man no time to Repent of it. We may be Guilty of many other Sins, and may live to Repent of them: But he that Murthers himſelf, is ſure to Dye in his Sin,

Sin, and to be hurried away in the Reek and Guilt of his own Bloud to the Tribunal of God, without allowing himſelf time to ask the forgiveneſs of it, or at leaſt to purge his Conſcience from ſo deep and indelible a ſtain as this.

And therefore, if we cannot be ſaved without Repentance, as the Goſpel aſſures us we can not, he that Deſtroys his own Life cannot be ſaved according to the Goſpel-Covenant, becauſe he dyes in a Sin that cannot be Repented of. 'Tis true, God may have more Mercy for Sinners than he makes us acquainted with, (which may be juſt enough to keep our hopes alive at the Death of ſuch Perſons) but the Goſpel being the laſt Revelation of the Grace of God, it is an infinite Preſumption, in expectation of unrevealed Grace, to venture upon a Sin, which all the Grace and Truth that came by *Jeſus Chriſt*, is too little to ſecure the Forgiveneſs of.

Theſe are great Aggravations of the Sin of Self-Murther. And I fear, the excuſes which are made for it

will

will prove no better, ſince they all center in a high diſcontent at the Providence of God. No man offers to make away himſelf, that thinks himſelf well in this World: or that ſubmits to the Troubles and Calamities which befall him, as coming from the juſt and overruling Hand of God. And for men to throw away their Lives in a Pet, and to grow ſo utterly weary of them that they cannot endure to live a few day's longer, or wait for Gods Permiſſion to *Depart in peace, is* a very high Reflection upon the wiſdom and goodneſs of his Providence: As if he had thruſt them into a World that was not *fit for them* to live in, as if they knew better when, and how, to deliver themſelves out of the Miſeries of this Mortal Life, than he do s; As if God had no Regard to their Sufferings, or had left it to their diſcretion to leave the World, and diſcharge themſelves from his Service when they pleas'd; or had not provided a better World to requit them for it: As if an *Eternal Weight of Glory* was not a ſufficient

Recompence for their Patience under the heavieſt Afflictions of this preſent Life, which *are but for a Moment*. This is ſo falſe and inſolent a Charge againſt the Providence of God, that it is enough to ſpoil the beſt-deſigned Action in the World, and therefore cannot excuſe ſo bloudy and unnatural an one, as Self-Murther is.

I ſhall cloſe all with a caution or two concerning this deſperate & unnatural Sin; and the rather, becauſe it has been obſerved by thoſe that have Travell'd into foreign Countries, that Self-Murther is far more common in this, than in any of the Nations about us.

1. Firſt then, let us be very cautious of thoſe Doctrines, which have occaſion'd many, and ſome very ſerious Perſons, to deſpair of the Mercy and goodneſs of God and in the Anguiſh of their Souls, to fling away themſelves into the dreadful Abyſs of Eternity. There is no ground, that I know of, from the Goſpel to believe, that God had no good-will to any particular Man from Eternity, and much leſs to the far greater part of Mankind; or that the Generality of

of Men are bound over to deſtruction with the Iron Chain of an Irreſpective Decree; or that Chriſt dyed to ſave but very few of thoſe that are called by his Name. And methinks the effects which theſe, and the like Doctrins, have had upon Poor Melancholy Souls, ſhould be no Arguments to recommed them to any ſerious and impartial Judgment. We ought to be very tender of narrowing the infinite Goodneſs of God, who would have all men to be Saved: Or laying the Damnation of Men upon any thing but their own wilful Opoſition to the Grace and Goodneſs of God, which *leadeth to Repentance.*

2. It concerns us to be very cautious of all the methods and degrees of this Sin; ſuch as piercing our Hearts with worldly Cares, poiſoning our Health and ſurfeiting our Bodies with Exceſs, and Dying the Martyrs of Intemperance or Luſt. How many owe their Death to the Revels of a Night? Drink away their reaſon, and drown themſelves in Rivers of Wine? Game high, and when they have loſt their Money, or engaged their Eſtates, or

Honours, ſell their Lives to Redeem them? Theſe Men do as certainly Kill themſelves, and very often as ſuddenly too, as he that ſtrangles himſelf, or ſheaths the Fatal Poyniard in his ſobbing and deſpairing Breaſt. And is not this to *Dye as a fool Dyes?* without any conſideration of the Life he has led, or of the Everlaſting State he is launching into!

What man, that is not fond of Diſtruction, and in love with Miſery, would venter his Life and Soul upon ſuch hazards as theſe? Were there no other Life than this, a prudent Man would not be prodigal of it; but to throw it away at one Caſt, or to ſtake it againſt the Pleaſure of a Debauch, when all Eternity depends upon it, is an aſtoniſhing inſtance of the Madneſs of Folly.

Deut. 32. 29. *Oh that* men *were Wiſe! that they underſtood this! that they would conſider their latter end!* That in kindneſs to their Souls, which muſt live forever, they would frequently entertain themſelves with the ſerious thoughts of Death, and Judgment,

Eter-

Eternal Happineſs and Miſery: and not ſuffer their Luſts and Vices to hurry them out of this World, before they have any reaſonable hopes of a better, or have made any tolerable preparation for it.

There is infinite odds between a State of Hope in this Life, and of endleſs Diſpair and Miſery in the next, *where the worm dyeth not, and the Fire is not quenched.* And then what a deſperate thing is it to caſt away our Lives, when all our hopes & intereſts in both Worlds do depend upon them? This is ſo wild and extravagant an Action, ſo contrary to all the dictates of Senſe and Reaſon, to the Rules of our Faith, and the foundation of our Hopes, to the very end of our Creation, the Honour and Goodneſs of the Divine Providence, and that eternal deſire of Happineſs, which is inſeparable from the Conſtitution of every rational Being, that there ſeems to be a principle wanting in humane Nature to account for it. And can we be ſo monſtrous and unnatural, as to break thro' all the reſtraints of Humanity & Religion, and comply with the inſtigation

of the devil to destroy our selves, rather than submit to the wise method of *God* to save us? Shall we Massacre our Souls and Bodies, which the Son of God did not think his own Life too dear a Sacrifice for? Shall we deprive our selves of all advantages for securing Eternal Life, to gratify a Passion that never pretended to the least degree of Pleasure or Satisfaction in it.

Let us make all the haste we can to qualify our selves for the Glory and Happiness of the Future State, there is no fear our time should lye upon our hands: Death, without our assistence, will soon take it off and Eternity will require and diserve the utmost preparation we can possibly make for it. Let us therefore be wise, and since through the Grace of God we may live and be happy, and weather out the stormes of this angry and tempestious World; let us *possess our Souls with Patience*, and value our Lives as one of the choicest Blessings of Heaven, and not *Judge our selves unworthy of Eternal Life*, by refusing to wait for it *all the days of our appointed time till our change cometh.*

SER-

SERMON VIII.

Concerning the Shortneſs and Inſtability of Life.

James 4. 14.

For what is your Life? It is even a Vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vaniſheth away.

THE Apoſtle in the Verſe before the Text expoſtulates with a ſort of Proling and buſy Men, that were laying a long train of Deſigns to raiſe their Fortunes in the World, without taking any notice of God's Providence, or asking his leave to thrive and be happy; *Go too now, ye that ſay, To day or to morrow we will go into ſuch a City, and*

Verſ. 13. *continue there a Year, and Buy and Sell, and get Gain.* As if he had ſaid, don't Reckon to faſt: You are ſure of nothing that you Count upon, nor conſider in whoſe hand your Life is, or on whoſe Pleaſure your fine Projects depend. You reckon as if you were abſolute Lords of Time; and had the World in a String, and could draw the Wealth and Traffick of it into your own Hands as you Pleaſe. You talk of great Matters, and are very Free of what is none of your own, while you diſpoſe of a Year to come: as if you knew the juſt Number of your Days, and were ſure your Lives would hold out as long as you have occaſion for them; *Whereas you know*

Verſ. 14. *not what ſhall be on the Morrow*, Or what a day may bring forth. You may Sicken and Die, before to morrow comes: Or you may finiſh your Journey, and Breath your laſt in the next Village, before you come to the City where your Deſigns are laid: *For what is your Life? It is even a Vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vaniſheth away.*

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Theſe Words are a lively and emphatical Deſcription of the frailty and ſhortneſs of Humane Life. The Queſtion, *What is your Life?* as St. *James* ſeems to propoſe it, to take down the confidence of preſumptuous Men, implyes it to be next to nothing, a thing not at all to be Truſted or Relied upon: *Alas what is your Life?* And the anſwer leſſens it as much: *It is a Vapour*, a thin vagrant Fume or Flaſh, that rather appears, than ſubſiſts, and that but *for a little time and then vaniſheth away*; that is, It preſently ſinks into that Nothing (as to this World) which, while it appear'd, it was ſo little rais'd above.

But the Life of Man in this World, as vain and ſhort as it is, deſerves his moſt ſerious Thoughts, becauſe there lies a mighty Weight upon it: no leſs than the concernment of a whole Eternity; And therefore the Shortneſs and Fickleneſs of it, are ſo far from excuſing a careleſs manner of Living, or Prompting us to Mirth and Jollity, as the onely Remedy againſt them, that they are very weighty

weighty conſiderations to quicken our preparations for a better Life; and to excite us to the Well ſpending of this, ſince there is an Eternity to be gained or loſt by the good or ill management of it.

Our great hindrance to this Duty is, that we are very apt to miſreckon our Lives, being willing to Believe they will laſt as long as we can invent Buſineſs for them, or Hope to find any Pleaſure in them. And for this Reaſon we need to be often Reminded of the ſhortneſs and inſtability of our Lives; For ſo many Years as we Reckon upon more than we have to Live. We Borrow upon the Intereſt of the next Life, and are therefore like to pay dearly for them, and eſpecially ſince we can never enjoy them. We ſhall Live indeed to Eternity, but our ſtay here will be ſhort: and yet what we do for Eternity, muſt be done here in this World; and therefore it behoves us to take a right Meaſure of our preſent Being, and not think that our Lives will ſtretch, as our Fancies and Deſires of Living do.

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For tis plain, that the Stronger our Hopes of Life are, and the more Years we Reckon we have before us, the greater our Temptations will be to put off the main and neceſſary Work of our Lives, and to run the hazard of a too late and fallacious Repentance: of being *Hardened by the Deceitfulneſs of Sin*, and of falling at laſt into the ravings and diſtractions of Dying Sinners, the ſad preſages of a miſerable Eternity. This we have often ſeen the Tryal of in Others, with that Ill Succeſs, that of all things methinks we ſhould not deſire to make the Experiment: which yet we cannot avoid, if we do as they have done before us, and ſuffer our ſelves to be Gull'd with the Flatteries of this preſent World into a Fond expectation of a long and happy continuance here. The ſureſt way to avoid the conſequences of this Fatal Errour, is to Underſtand the true State of our Lives, and to ſeaſon our Minds with frequent and ſerious Meditations upon it, that ſo we may apply them to the proper and great ends of

Living

Living. To aſſiſt you herein I ſhall do theſe two Things:

1. I ſhall remind you of this certain and important Truth, That the Life of Man in this World is very ſhort and tranſitory; And then,

2. Shew you what Practical Inferences may be Drawn from the conſideration of the ſhortneſs and inſtability of our Lives.

1. The Life of Man in this World is very ſhort and Tranſitory. This is matter of ſenſe, and one of the moſt obvious Truths that ever Nature or Experience taught us. The Grave, every time it opens its mouth gives us a ſenſible Demonſtration of it; It ſhews us of what Mold we are made, what we are, and what we muſt ſhortly be. As ſoon as the vigour and gaiety of Youth are gone, before we come to the borders of Old-age we many times grow ſenſible of the the Decays of this drooping Life, and begin to feel our ſelves Wearing and Dying; And ſtill the longer we live and the wiſer and fitter we are to paſs our Judgment upon things, the more Apprehenſive we are of the

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ſhortneſs and fallacy of Life. Our firſt years indeed ſeem to paſs ſlowly on, becauſe they are the years of diſcipline, of curbing our Phanſies, and correcting our Errours: we are then commonly very eager in purſuit of Vanity, and we often meet with ſtops and interruptions in it from our Tutors and Governors: and this makes us almoſt think that our time ſtands ſtill the while, and we ſhall never be our own Men, *i. e.* have the command of our time, and the liberty to ſquander and throw it away as we pleaſe. But when once we have paſt the age of diſcipline, have had ſome experience of Life, and lived long enough to reflect upon the firſt Stage of it, we certainly ſee our miſtake, and chide time no more for not mending its ſpeed, and paſſing away ſo heavily from us. when we look upon the reverſe of our Lives, upon the years that are paſt, we have almoſt nothing left in view but the greater Sins and Follies we committed in them. Then, they appear but as a few days: then we are apt enough to ſay, how ſoon are

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Twenty or Thirty years fled and gone? How inſenſibly are they ſlipt away? And were we to live twice as many more the Caſe would be the very ſame: and as ſoon as they are gone, we ſhould be at our old complaint again, that our time in this World is very ſhort, and be ready to ſay with good Old *Jacob*, (when he had lived neare twice as long as the Long-livers of our days generally do) *of my Pilgrimage been.*

Gen. 47. 9. *Few and evil have the days of the life*

When we come to the uſe of our reaſon, and begin to look abroad into the World, to obſerve the Monuments, and peruſe the Annals and Hiſtories of ancient times, we miſs all the Generations of Men that peopled the World in former Ages. *Our Fa-*

Zach. 1, 5. *thers, where are they? and the Prophets, do they live for ever?* Where are all the Founders and Inhabitants of ancient Kingdoms? all the Great Princes and Philoſophers? the Shrewd Politicians, the Mighty Generals, and the Numerous Armies? the Wiſe and the Fooliſh, the Holy and Profane? All that ever Lived and Breath-

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ed till this preſent Age? Is there none left to Anſwer the Queſtion? Then conſidering the Age of the World at this day, and the many Succeſſions of Men that have been before us, there is Nothing more Demonſtrable, than that the Days of Men are few upon the Earth.

One Generation paſſeth away, and another Generation cometh; We are always upon the Remove, making Room for our Succeſſors, and for new Scenes of Providence, which wait for our Departure out of this World, and the Coming of a better or a worſe Generation into it. We have but a ſhort Part to Act, and when that is done, we muſt clear the Stage, and give Place to thoſe that are Coming after Us, becauſe *a ſhort Work will the Lord make upon the Earth.* Eccleſ. 1. 4. Rom. 9. 28

God has ſet us our Bounds which we cannot Paſs; and he has ſet them ſo near us, that it is ſtrange we ſhould Overlook them, or Dream of an Immortality here, while they ſtand ſo fairly in our View. *The days of our Years* (ſaith the Pſalmiſt) *are*

are threeſcore Years and ten : and if by reaſon of Strength, they be fourſcore Years, yet is their Strength, Labour and Sorrow : for it is ſoon cut off, and we fly away. Pſal. 90. 10. This was a mighty Fall, from the Age of the Patriarchs, before the Flood : after which the Life of Man ſhorten'd apace, till it came ſo low as Seventy or Eighty Years, which is now the ordinary Meaſure ; and probably was ſo ever ſince the Murmuring of the *Iſraelites* in the Wilderneſs, at the Relation which the Spies brought them of the Land of Promiſe.

But when the *Pſalmiſt* tells us, that our Age is reduced to threeſcore and ten or fourſcore Years, we muſt not preſently Reckon that ſo many Years will come to our ſhares. We cannot promiſe our ſelves another day, for *we know not what ſhall be on the morrow* ; and therefore can make no certain Reckoning of it. All the time we can call our own, is that which we have lived already ; So much God has given us, and ſo much we muſt anſwer for, and we

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cannot be ſure that he will give us a day more :

Nemo tam Divos habuit faventes
Craſtinum ut ſibi poſſit polliceri.

Some are gone in a moment, from the Cradle to the Grave ; and very many before they underſtand the conſequence of Life and Death : we Die many times when we think of nothing leſs, in the flower and vigour of our Age, before we have any Symptoms of Death upon us. But becauſe ſome there are that rub on to threeſcore and ten, or fourſcore Years, and very few that exceed them, ſeventy or eighty Years (at a moderate computation) may well paſs for the utmoſt Period of our Lives. This we generally eſteem a full Age, and yet when we Draw towards it, are ready to complain of the ſcantneſs and ſhortneſs of it. And if we think it ſhort when we ſee it drawn out to its utmoſt length, what are we to Judge of it, when it is cut ſhorter by forty or fifty Years than the ordinary Meaſure ? What is the life of Children, who Die hanging

at their Mothers Breaſts? How ſhort is the Race of young Men, who expire while their Blood boils in their Veins, and yet have as deep an intereſt in Eternity, as the longeſt Livers upon Earth? But ſince the longeſt Life, by our own Confeſſion, is ſhort, I need not ask how little the ſhorteſt is to be accounted of.

But you will ſay then, what need is there of this Diſcourſe? Why muſt we be taught a Truth, which we are ready to Seal with our Tears, and every time we contemplate upon, do ſadly bewail the certainty of? I anſwer, Tho' it is evident that our Lives are ſhort, and we all pretend to know it, yet it is certain that our Memories are ſhort too; and that our fondneſs of this World is ſuch that we are apt to Forget where we are, upon what Terms we are here, how ſuddenly we muſt Remove, and what is Requiſite to procure us a ſafe and eaſy Paſſage into that Eternal World, where we muſt dwell in perfect Bliſs or Anguiſh for ever. We are ſo much enamour'd with this preſent

ſent World, that, like Paſſionate Lovers, we ſeem not to remember what we ſay or do while we are converſing with it; It fetters our Memories, while it captivates our Affections: And while it ſubdues our Hearts, it bereaves us of the beſt uſe of our Reaſon, which certainly is to *ſet our affections on Things Above*, where we hope e're long to be: *And not on Things on the Earth*, where (were it worth our while) we are ſure we cannot ſtay long to enjoy them.

This is our great Unhappineſs: It is the inordinate love of this World that makes us forget our ſelves, and the deſign of our Creator in ſending us hither: And the proper Remedy againſt it, is to keep our Minds as much awake as we can, with frequent and ſerious Thoughts, on the ſuddenneſs of our Departure hence. For it is not being of the opinion that our Lives are ſhort, when we hear a Diſcourſe about it, or follow a hearty Man to his Grave, that will cure us of our Dotage on preſent Things; Nothing leſs will

do this than a quick and laſting Senſe of the ſhortneſs and uncertainty of our Lives. The power of Conviction laſts no longer than it is preſent to the Mind, or become habitual and familiar to it: as appears by the vaniſhing of thoſe ſolemn Vows, which Men commonly make in their Sickneſs, (and which nothing elſe could extort from them) as ſoon as the Danger is over, and they begin to flatter themſelves with new Hopes, of a long and pleaſant Life.

And therefore as Melancholy a Thought as it is, that our Lives are ſhort, beſides that it is never unſeaſonable, it is one of the moſt uſeful Thoughts that we can carry about us. For it is certain, we can never over come this flattering and enchanting World without it, and then we can never arrive to the Glory and Happineſs of that to come. As Cold a Truth as it is, that we muſt ſhortly Dye, and leave this delicious World, it will mightily help to quicken our Devotions, and inflame our Affections to Heavenly things; It will thereby prevent a

World

World of Sin and Folly : It will excite us to haſten our Repentance, to make the beſt of our little Life, and improve all advantages we hold by it, for a Bleſſed Eternity. And for theſe Reaſons, the Scripture often recommends this ſerious Meditation to us : And to keep it freſh in our Memories, preſents us with great variety of affecting Emblems, and lively Repreſentations of the ſhortneſs and uncertainty of Humane Life : Such as are moſt obvious to our Senſes, and apt to raiſe a new Paſſion in our Minds, every time we think of them. For inſtance,

1. Our Life is compared in Scripture to things of the moſt tranſitory and fading Nature. St. *James* calls it a *Vapour that appears for a little time, and then vaniſheth away.* Such is the Life of Mortal Men, even the Greateſt and Gallanteſt of them : It is up & down in a moment : It is a Vapour very often in the civil, as well as in the natural ſenſe; and commonly the greater Oſtentation it makes, the ſooner it diſappears and is gone, and the Eye that ſaw

it ſees it no more. And on the ſame account it is compared to a Shadow, 1 *Chron.* 29. 15. and to the Graſs and Flower of the Fields for its weak and fading Nature, *Pſalm* 103. 15,16, *Verſ. As for Man, his Days are as Graſs: as a Flower of the Field, ſo he flouriſheth; for the Wind paſſeth over it, and it is gone, and the place thereof ſhall know it no more.* So *Job* 14. 1, 2. *Man, that is born of a Woman, is of few Days, and full of Trouble: he cometh forth like a Flower, and is cut down: he fleeth alſo as a ſhadow and continueth not.*

2. The ſhortneſs of Humane Life is repreſented by things that are ſmalleſt in number and extenſion in their Kinds. Thus the days of
Job 7. 1. Man are ſaid to be *like the Days of an Hireling:* Which are few and precarious in compariſon of thoſe which the Children of the Family enjoy in their Fathers Houſe; as our Saviour himſelf obſerves, *The Ser-*
John 8. 35. *vant abideth not in the Houſe for ever, but the Son abideth for ever.* And ſo the Pſalmiſt meaſures the Life of Man by the breadth of his hand, which

which bears no proportion to the vaſt circumference of the Earth, or Heavens: *Behold* (ſaith he) *Thou haſt made my days as an Hand-breath*; Thou haſt encloſed my Life in a very narrow Compaſs: And then he adds, as if he had ſpoken too laviſhly of it, and *mine Age is as nothing before thee*: A mere cypher or nullity, if compared to thy Eternal Duration; Whereupon he concludes, *verily every Man at his beſt Eſtate is altogether Vanity.* *Pſal.* 39, 6.

3. Our Life is alſo compared to things of the ſpeedieſt and ſwifteſt Motion, to remind us that it is Haſtening away apace, and will be too nimble for us, if we delay the proper Work and Buſineſs which God hath aſſign'd us in this World. *My Days* (ſaith Job) *are ſwifter than a Weavers ſhuttle: Oh remember that my Life is Wind.* We read in Scripture of *the Wings of the Wind*, which denote the wonderful ſwiftneſs of it; And ſuch is our Life: It is always upon the Wing: It makes all poſſible haſt to be gone; It keeps pace with the Wings of the *Job* 7. 6, 7.

Wind: It *is a Wind* (ſaith the Pſal-
Pſal. 78. 29 miſt) *that paſſeth away, and cometh not again.* Our time is ever in motion, and always keeps the ſame ſpeed, what ever we are doing the while. And ſince we have but a little time, and that little (however ſpent) is always leſſening and drawing to a Period, it cannot be long e're the whole ſtock be exhauſted, tho' we ſhould Husband it to the beſt advantage, and live out (which perhaps not one of a thouſand do's) to the utmoſt ſtretch and poſſibility of Living.

4. The ſhortneſs and inſtability of this preſent Life is ſet forth by alluſions to things which are moveable at Pleaſure: Implying, that as ſhort as the ordinary Term of Life is, it is always ſubject to the Providence of God, and often leſſened by him in *whoſe Hands our Times are.* In this reſpect our Life is compared to *a Shepherd's Tent*, and our Bodies to *Tabernacles, i. e.* Extempore Houſes or Receptacles, that are preſently ſet up and taken down, or removed at the Pleaſure of the Owner. And in this

this Language *Hezechiah* complains upon the ſad tidings the Prophet brought him of his approaching Death, *Iſa.* 38. *v.* 10, 12. I *am deprived of the Reſidue of my Years: Mine Age is departed, and is removed from me, as a Shepherd's Tent*; And this he immediately aſcribes to the ſpecial Hand of God, the Sovereign Lord of Life and Death: *He will cut me off with Pining Sickneſs, from Day even to Night, thou wilt make an end of me.* Thus alſo our Bodies are ſtyled *Tabernacles,* which are no durable Habitations, no certain Dwelling-places; The Spirit that lodges within them knows they were never deſigned for its conſtant Abode and Reſidence: *Knowing* (ſaith S. *Peter*) *that ſhortly I muſt put off this my Tabernacle, even as our Lord Jeſus Chriſt hath ſhewed me.* We know theſe Sorry Tenements cannot ſtand long: We cannot tell how ſoon we may be Deveſted of theſe Earthly Bodies: but when Death comes to undreſs us, we certainly put them off, and very often before they are worn out with Age, or are almoſt ever the worſe for

2 Pet. 1. 14.

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Wearing. We have no leaſe of our Lives, but are every day liable to a Diſcharge : For tho' God hath ſet us a Term that we cannot paſs, yet he hath left it in his own Power to cut off as much of it as he Pleaſes, and accordingly our Lives are frequently much ſhorter than the common Meaſure.

5. The Life of Man is ſo very frail and ſhort, that it is reſembled to the vaineſt and moſt inſignificant Things. In Scripture it is ſaid to flee away *as a Dream*, a meer Deluſion of the Fancy, which vaniſhes at the chace of a waking Thought, and is nothing but Ramble and Contradiction when the Mind recovers the ſcatter'd Ideas of it. The Pſalmiſt alſo compares it to the *Telling of a Story*, Pſ. 90. 9. *We bring our Years to an End, as it were a Tale that is Told.* As we are talking and jeſting Death intrudes into our Company, and our Life is gone in a Trice, *dicto Citius*, before we can bring out the ſaying we were upon, or as ſome Paraphraſe the Words according to the *Arabic* Verſion, our Years are reputed as a Spi-

Job, 20. 8. *Pſal.* 73. 20

Spiders Web, whoſe curious Frame and Contexture ſignifies nothing to its own preſervation, having no ſtrength or ſolidity to ſupport it.

By ſuch familiar Emblems as theſe do's the Spirit of God, in whom, we live, breath, and have our beings, admoniſh us of (what we are very apt to Forget) the frailty and uncertainty of this preſent Life. And this it do's to cure us of our Heat and Paſſion for this World, and the great Vanity of reckoning upon time to come, which at preſent we are ſure is none of ours, and perhaps never ſhall be; and to excite and quicken us to ſecure our everlaſting Intereſts, and to take care of the whole compaſs of our Beings, of which the longeſt Life in this World is a very ſmall and inconſiderable portion. And as this ſhews the great concernment of our Creator for our well-being and happineſs, ſo it is reaſonable to think that the thoughts of it ſhould ſtir and affect our Minds: and that while we are hear we have but a ſhort time to live, we ſhould be willing to underſtand the beſt way of Living and Dying, of making

making a good hand of this preſent Life, and of ordering our Steps as behoves thoſe that Tread upon the Brink of Eternity.

I come now to the Second Thing propoſed, which was to ſhew what practical Inferences may be drawn from the conſideration of the ſhortneſs and inſtability of our Lives. And as unpleaſant as this Argument is, if we will but deal faithfully with our ſelves, & impartially weigh the conſequences of it, I doubt not but we may learn a great deal of Wiſdom from it, both for the regulation of our Lives, and reconciling our Minds to the ſhortneſs of them.

Firſt then, we ſhould hence learn to lay aſide all expectation of meeting with true and real Happineſs in this World. For true Happineſs is the moſt conſtant and durable thing that can be: And then we may be ſure that the Happineſs of this World, from which we muſt part ſo ſoon, and without which we muſt live a whole Eternity in the Other, is not true and proper Happineſs.

We come into this World to conquer,

quer, not to court or enjoy it; ſo long as we are converſant with it, and lye upon its border's, it will be always tempting and troubling us: ever and anon preſenting us with new occaſions of ſhewing our virtue, and improving our conqueſt over it; and till we have compleated our Victory, we cannot expect our Triumph. And it is well for us that our Triumph is not aſſign'd us in this World, where the greeneſt Laurels do quickly Fade, and the Head that wears them is ſoon laid in the Duſt. Now let us digeſt this Principle well, that this Life is not a State of Reſt and Happineſs, and it will ſurely cool our Affections to the preſent World, and ſave us a great deal of trouble and vexation in perſuing the Vanities of it: for, that is the proper Name of things, which appear but for a little time, and then vaniſh away. And this is a good ſtep towards a diſcovery of the Place and Nature of Happineſs, and engaging our Minds in the Proſecution of it. Here it is not to be found, and therefore I muſt ſeek for

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it in the next World, where I ſhall dwell for ever, and where all things are firm and everlaſting. And ſince it lyes not in fading Pleaſures, or in any of the periſhing delights of ſenſe, I will look for it in things of a better and more permanent Nature, in Spiritual and Divine Enjoyments; I will expect my happineſs in Heaven only as the place, and in God as the Fountain of it. And let the World ſmile at me for this (as it is like it will:) my Life will be ſuddenly gone, and 'tis my Intereſt to make the beſt of it that I can, and much better to be jear'd into Happineſs, than decoy'd into Miſery.

Thus, as the Shortneſs of our Lives is a plain Argument that we are not capable of being truly Happy in this World, ſo the ſerious conſideration of it will both leſſen our eſteem of its Delights and Treaſures, and ſtrongly move us to aſpire after a more laſting and bleſſed State. And this was it that made thoſe excellent Men (*Hebr.* 11, 16.) who *confeſſed that they were Strangers and Pilgrims on the Earth* (here to day, and to mor-

verſ. 13.

row

row gone to their Everlaſting home) deſpiſe this Worlds tranſitory Glory, and *deſire a better Country, that is an Heavenly*; a more aſſured and enduring State, a place of undiſturbed Reſt and Joy, of endleſs and never-fading Happineſs.

2. The conſideration of the ſhortneſs and uncertainty of our Lives, ſhould ſilence our complaints, and comfort us under the greateſt Evils and Troubles that are incident to us in this World. The Miſeries of this preſent Life; beſides, that they are Checquer'd with innumerable Mercies, cannot be very great, becauſe they muſt be ſhort, and a little time and patience will eaſe us of them. Many of them are but *Umbræ Malorum*, as *Seneca* calls them, mere ſhadows and appearances of Evil, ſuch as we apprehend in our Dreams when our Fancies are troubled, and when we awake have no real Miſchief or Terrour in them. And ſuch are our Wants of all the unneceſſary things of this Life; we fancy we ſhould live more pleaſantly, if we had more Eſtate, or more Power and *Sen. Ep.* 89.

and Applauſe in the World; and it may be, we ſhould live worſe than we do, and not ſo long as we may do without them: For we ſee that few Men that have them, have virtue enough to make a good Uſe of them, and that the Eſtate and the Owner do very often help to Ruine one another. And for thoſe Afflictions which are real, and we cannot but feel the ſmart and inconvenience of ſuch, as Sickneſs, Pain, Ignominy and Oppreſſion; if they are moderate, they are worth a Complaint: if exceſſive and inſupportable, they cannot laſt long without mixtures of Eaſe and Comfort, becauſe we cannot bear them long. The ſharper they are, the ſooner will they cut our way through them, and let in Death to releaſe us from them.

And this comfort we have from the ſhortneſs of our Lives, that there is a ſure Remedy at hand againſt all our Maladies, againſt all the deſeats we contract in this unwholſom Climate, and the inconvenience we endure in this troubleſom and uneaſy World. Muſt I ſhortly Dye? Why then

then I ſhall quickly have eaſe, and in a little time ſhall never be Sick more; after that, I ſhall no more complain of reſtleſs Nights and tireſom Days: I ſhall Sleep ſecurely under the clods of the Valley, and never mind what the buſie and ungoverned Rout, or the Malicious and Cenſorious World will be ſaying of me, I ſhall no more be griped with Oppreſſion, or pincht with Want, or ſtung with Reproaches, or diſturbed by the Folly and Madneſs of the people. The Grave is a Sanctuary: *There the Wicked* (ſaith *Job*) *ceaſe from troubling, and there the weary are at Reſt*; *There the Priſoners reſt together: they hear not the Voice of the Oppreſſor*; *the ſmall and the great are there, and the Servant is free from his Maſter.* The poor Man lyes as eaſily in his Grave, and wants as little there as the Monarch on his Throne. And conſidering how full of trouble and diſquiet the Life of Man is, its Happy for us that we have not far to go to our Graves, where we may Bury all our Griefs, and be eaſed of every thing that is croſs and burthenſome to us

Job 3. 17, 18, 19.

in this World. Since *all the days of the afflicted are evil.* Why ſhould they repine that they are no more? Why ſhould the Mariner, that is embarkt in a crazy Veſſel, amongſt the Rocks and Pirates, be troubled that the Haven is near? 'Twas a noble Anſwer that the *Spartans* returned to King *Philip* of *Macedon*, when he threatned to diſtreſs them, He cannot hinder us from Dying. Death will give us a Writ of Eaſe in ſpite of the Angry Tyrant; and if we take care to live well, we may be glad to be diſpatcht out of the ſtorms and hurricanes of this threatning and tempeſtuous World.

Prov. 15. 15.

3. Since our Lives are very ſhort we ſee what a fair propoſal God is pleaſed to make us, when he promiſes Eternal Life upon the ſpending of theſe ſhort Lives in his Service. What greater offer can we deſire? Or what better Advantage could we hope to make of our time, if it were at our own diſpoſal, and there lay no other obligation upon us to employ it in God's Service? We cannot but ſay, that Religion teaches us to make the beſt uſe of our time, becauſe it teaches

teaches us to live like Men, in a due ſubordination to our Maker, and to do the beſt things for the World, and for ſelves, which is the Glory and Perfection of our Nature. But ſuppoſe, it were poſſible for us to be diſcharged from this Obligation to a Life of Virtue and Religion, or that we might ſafely break it without drawing the diſpleaſure of God upon us, yet ſince Heaven is Promiſed us upon this condition, that we live *ſoberly, Righteouſly and Godly,* for the little time we have to ſpend in this World, how is it Poſſible that we ſhould refuſe it, when we have the proſpect of ſo glorious a Reward, and may be ſure to be completely Happy ever after? Again, ſuppoſe Religion had no Temporal Promiſes to invite us to it, and (which is the utmoſt that was ever Pretended againſt it) ſuppoſe it were a tireſome thing to ſpend our lives in the Service of God, and to be tyed up from the liberties which humane Nature ſo ſtrongly deſires, yet ſurely when Eternal Joys are ſet before us, we may well endure the uneaſineſs of it, and chearfully diſpence with a

ſhort trouble to poſſeſs our ſelves of Pleaſures for evermore. Alas, what is this little Flaſh of Life, when thou look ſt into a vaſt Eternity, and are invited into a State, of endleſs Bliſs and Glory? When it is almoſt ſpent, we generally complain that it is quickly gone; and they that have ſpent it beſt, are beſt pleaſed with themſelves, and are only troubled that they have not ſpent it better; and if they had a hundred lives more they would not chuſe to ſpend one of them in the Service of Sin, or on any account to want the comfort and Satisfaction which they find in ſerving and pleaſing God. Many of them have thought Heaven a cheap Bargain at the Price of Martyrdom and Perſecution, and gladly embrac't a Stake, rather than enjoy *the Pleaſures of Sin for a ſeaſon.* And certainly the teſtimony of good Men, who have made Religion the buſineſs of their lives, is far more credible than theirs, that never had the Patience to examine its Principles, or to make any competent Tryal of them.

Beſides this, if we ſubſtract all that time which God allows us to provide

provide for our ſelves and Families, to refreſh our Bodies with Food and Reſt, and other lawful Diverſions, to ſerve and enjoy our Friends, and exchange good Offices with our Neighbours and Acquaintance, which for the moſt part paſſes away pleaſantly enough with us, the remainder of our Life is ſo ſmall, that we may be aſhamed to grutch the Devoting of it to our great Benefactor, at whoſe pleaſure it is whether we ſhall live a moment or not. After all, were the Duties of Religion every where as ſharp and difficult as ſome men eſteem them, yet ſurely they are much eaſier than Eternal Torments, and it is nothing ſo irkſom to ſerve God, as it is to be damned; and if we think ſo, we cannot but allow that the ſpending a few years in his Service, tho' it ſhould prove a Pennance to us, ſince we may both eſcape the Damnation of Hell, and enjoy the Happineſs of Heaven by it, is ſo fair a demand; that nothing can ever excuſe the refuſal of it.

4. The ſhortneſs and inſtability of our lives ſhould teach us to moderate

our Cares about earthly things, and ſubmit all our deſigns and purpoſes to God's good Pleaſure and Providence over us. 'Tis a ſtrange Abſurdity, which the over-buſie and deſigning Men of this World are Guilty of, that they love it better than their lives, tho' all their enjoyment of it depends upon them. They complain that their lives are ſhort, and yet ſell them very cheap to purchaſe a little Eſtate or Honour; and wear them out much faſter than they need to do, by immoderate Toyl and Labor, only to have a Name for leaving ſomething behind them. To Dy Rich, they Kill themſelves with piercing and vexatious Cares, and have hardly the wiſdom of the Fool in the Goſpel, to eaſe and refreſh their Souls, tho' they have *goods laid up for many years*, and ſcarce know where, or on whom to beſtow them. And methinks of all Perſons, ſuch Men ſhould not Tax the Providence of God, for allowing them ſo ſhort a time in this World, ſince they take ſo much pains to ſhorten it themſelves, and cannot afford to live out the time which God and Nature have allowed them. On the

the other hand, where is the wiſdom, ſeeing our lives are ſo ſhort, of laying a long Train of Deſigns reaching into Future Ages, and promiſing our ſelves ſucceſs upon any little encouragement from the preſent Poſture of Affairs, when it is impoſſible we ſhould live to ſee, or be competently aſſured of the concluſion of them? Who that reads *Campanellas* Diſcourſe concerning the *Spaniſh* Monarchy, can forbear to ſmile at the ſimplicity, or admire the confidence of crowing Mortals, who undertake to govern the World in future Times, and inſtruct the Providence of God how to demean it ſelf in relation to them? 'Tis too much for a mortal Man to undertake for the events of a ſingle day; 'tis very unreaſonable for him to trouble himſelf and the World with Projects which are never like to take effect in his days, and nothing is more abſurd; than to brag what great things he will do at ſuch a time, which it may be, proves to be Ten or Twenty years after he is gone to his Grave. St. *James* having to do with ſuch men, teaches them (immediately

after the Text) to expreſs themſelves in a more Modeſt and Chriſtian Style: *For that* (ſaith he) *ye ought to ſay, If the Lord will, we ſhall live, and do this or that.* Since your Projects depend upon your Lives, and your Lives upon God, you will do well to take him into your Counſels, and propoſe none but reaſonable and moderate things, always ſubmitting your ſelves and them to his Wiſdom and Conduct: to leave Future Time and Events to God's over-ruling Providence to do your preſent Duties, and not intereſt your ſelves in the World any farther than you may be ſerviceable to it.

5. The Conſideration of the ſhortneſs of our Lives, and the great inſtability of them; ſhould engage the youngeſt of us to begin them well, and to uſe all the care and Frugality that they can in the ſpending of them, leaſt they ſhould not hold out for the great purpoſes of Living. While we are young we are as capable of Virtue and Religion, of Dying, and going to Heaven, as when we are Old. All theſe things are neceſſary to our Happineſs, and as much

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our concernment now, as ever they will be; all the difference is, that Youth is the beſt, and perhaps the only opportunity that a young Man will ever have of being good and happy. Old-Age is no neceſſary part of Humane Life; there are more that Dy young, than that Live to be Old; and of thoſe that do ſo, there are few that live well, that did not begin to live betimes; I mean, that had not an early ſenſe of God and Religion.

Conſider therefore, you that are young, how much it concerns you to make Religion your firſt and immediate care, if you would aim to do the moſt neceſſary and important Work of your Lives to the beſt advantage. You will be ſure to eſcape two mighty Hazards by it: *viz.* The Danger of Dying Young, which is over when you are fitted for Heaven by an early Piety: And that of deferring your Repentance till you are Old, or you know not when; which ſeldom comes to any Thing, or at moſt but to a deep and piercing Sorrow that you did not Repent ſooner, when you had Life and Quickneſs of Thought, Opportunity and Ability of

of ſerving God, and laying a good and laſting Foundation for Eternal Life. And then by conſecrating your green and blooming Years to the Service of God, you will have the advantage of making the moſt of a ſhort Life; You will ſoon find the ways of Religion pleaſant, and the pleaſantneſs of them will engage you to Perſevere to the End, which will be everlaſting Life, and Pleaſure for evermore. By ſetting out early towards Heaven, and taking the morning of your Days, you will find it a much eaſier Journey than they generally do, who thinking to Ride it off in a few hours in the Evening, are ſoon benighted and forc't to Travel without any certain Guide or Light, till they ſtumble into a Dark Grave, and a doubtful Immortality. And ſhould you live but to a competent Age, yet beginning Young, and making the beſt Improvement of your ſhort Time, you may do very great and eminent Things for God's Honour and your Own, and the good of Humane Society; For your Comfort in this, and your Happineſs in the other World; And ſo may live

more

more in your little time, than they that live longer by many Years, than the late Evening Convert, or the Sinner that is an hundred Years Old. For indeed we are not properly ſaid to Live, till we are alive to God and our Redeemer, and begin to look towards Heaven and Eternity, which are the proper and great Ends of Living. And therefore, if we would make the beſt of our Time, as we had need to do that have ſo little in Store. We muſt begin at the right End, and Engage betimes in the Service of God, and not think it enough, when we have ſpent the Flower of our Age upon His and our own greateſt Enemy, to put him off with a few of our blaſted and wither'd Days, *in which we have no Pleaſure*, and can have no Reaſon to think they ſhould be acceptable to Him. And for the ſame Reaſon, it concerns us, having begun well, to hold on in the ways of Vertue and Piety, and to get as forward as we can towards Heaven in the next Stage of our Lives; remembring that our Lives are now ſhorter than they were, and that our Time is every day more precious than

other,

other, the value of it improving as the Stock Decreaſes: That nothing leſs than our Progreſs in Well-doing can ſecure our hopeful beginnings: That every good Work we do, will both help to inſure and enhance our Reward; and that the true Way of lengthening our Time, is to Live it all, and apply it to the uſes of a Bleſſed Eternity.

6. Laſtly, This ſhould admoniſh thoſe, that in a Courſe of Nature are drawing near a Concluſion of their Lives, and have been long entangled in the Affairs and Buſineſs of this World, to haſten their Preparation for a Better. Such Perſons need not be taught, that having lived fifty or threeſcore Years already, their Lives are ſhorter than they were by ſo many Years, and therefore in Reaſon they cannot think to live many more: and then, it is to be Hoped, the little Time that is left is not too much for Heaven. If we think it is, I cannot imagine with what confidence we can entertain any Hopes of going thither: And if we think not, why do we not follow our own Convictions, ſtrike off immediately from

from this World, and gain all the Time and advantage that we can to Purify our ſelves from all Pollution of Fleſh and Spirit, to Adorn and Beautify our Souls with Divine Virtues and Graces, and qualify them for the bleſt Society of God, and the glorious Spirits that are about his Throne?

We have lived to little purpoſe, if all this while we are not ſenſible of the Vanity and Fallacy of this World, and muſt have very mean apprehenſions of Celeſtial Bliſs and Happineſs, if we can but ſo much as deſire to live always here; However it do's not lie at our choice; We may chooſe whether we will be Happy or Miſerable in the other World, but thither we muſt go, and one of the two we muſt certainly be: And ſince we are ſo far upon our Way, it highly concerns us, if we make Heaven our Option (and it is ſtrange if we ſhould not) to be very quick and ſerious in our Preparations for it.

They that have loſt all, or the beſt part of their Time, have none to loſe now, unleſs they will loſe all Eternity with it. And for thoſe that have met with

with great interruptions in their Chriſtian Courſe, having been hurried up and down by the Affairs and Buſineſs of this World, it behoves them to get out of the Noiſe and Buſtle of it, ſo ſoon as ever they can, and to redeem the precious Hours and Opportunities they have loſt of ſerving God, and laying up their Treaſures in Heaven, tho' they ſhould Dye ſome hundreds the poorer for it. For ſurely the next Life is of far greater concernment than this, and therefore it becomes the beſt Men, when they have had their ſhare of the Trouble and Buſineſs of this World, and have enough to carry them through it, to retire as faſt as they can, not merily to enjoy their Eaſe, but as the Apoſtle ſpeaks in another Caſe, πρὸς τὸ ἔυσχημον καὶ ἔυπρόσεδρον τῷ κυρίῳ ἀπερισπάςως, that in a Fitting and Decent manner they may *attend* upon the Service of God, and mind the Work and Buſineſs of the next World *without diſtraction*. 'Tis very unſeemly to ſee Men, that have more than enough for this, and pretend to live upon the Faith and Hope of another World, purſuing Riches and

1 Cor. 7. 35.

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Honours to the very brink of the Grave, and Gaſping after Preferments, almoſt with their Dying Breath.

Men that Traffick in a Forreign-Land, have generally the Wiſdom to withdraw their Effects, when they are leaving the Country, and returning to their Native Soil. And 'tis ſaid of the Holy Men, mention'd, that *they declared plainly, that they ſought an Heavenly Country*: Not by a mere verbal Profeſſion, but by doing ſuch things as more plainly ſignified the reality of their concernment for it, *viz.* By refuſing the Grandeurs of the Earth, and deſpiſing the little Pageantries of this World. And what leſs can we do to teſtify the ſincerity of our Chriſtian Profeſſion, who renounce the World in our Baptiſm, than freely to take our leave of it, ſo ſhort a time before we go to our Graves? *Heb.* 11. *v.* 15, 16.

In ſhort, 'tis high time, when we are upon the confines of the other State, and can ſee Eternal Life Juſt before us, to Diſengage our ſelves from the Diſtractions of this buſy World, and to gain leiſure before we Dye, to compoſe our Spirits, to perfect our Repentance, and to fetch off the Soil and Defilement we have contracted in

in the hurry of our Wordly Occaſions, or by keeping too much upon the common Roads. Men eſpecially, that have run through a World of Buſineſs, muſt have borrowed much Time from the Hours of Prayer, and other Religious Duties; and ſhould therefore make ſome kind of Reſtitution by giving their laſt Days to the peculiar Service of God, and not venture to go reeking out of this World, with a ſteam of Earthly Affections about them, into his immediate Preſence.

To conclude, ſince *the Time of our Diſſolution is at Hand*, *What manner of Perſons ought we to be in all Holy Converſation and Godlineſs? Looking for and haſtening unto the coming of the Day of Chriſt, the Glorious Day of our Redemption from Death, and Triumphing over all the Enemies of our Eternal Salvation?* Let us therefore bid adieu to all the flaſhy Delights and Impertinent Cares of this Tranſitory World: Let us lay aſide every Weight that beſets us, and fix our Converſation in Heaven: Let us raiſe our Spirits, and lift up our Heads with Joy, in Expectation of the Saviour, the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, who ſhall change our vile Body, and make it like unto glorious Body, by His Mighty Power, which is able to ſubdue all Things unto himſelf; To whom with the Father and Holy Spirit, be Aſcribed all Honour and Glory, Dominion and Power, both now and ever, *Amen.*

THE END.